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THE OFFICE OF THE LIVER IS TO CLEANSE THE

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BY THE AUTHOR OF

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MY LADY GREEN SLEEVES.

Book I.

CHAPTER I.

"The light upspringeth, the dew down dingeth,
The sweet lark singeth her hours of prime;
Phœbus up-spenteth joy to rest wenteth,
So lost is mine intent and gone is the time."

VOICKS!

Away we go with the morning wind full in our faces, and
making the low stone wall before us, top it easily and together,
crossing the meadow abreast, and rising to the ditch beyond
a faultless line of five.

Down the gradual descent to the valley, now braided with
running waters, breasting the steep ascent of the hill beyond,
so to the hamlet churchyard on its summit, across which
we tread lightly and in silence, though it would take a louder
Tantivvy than any our leader has blown to-day to awaken
those who sleep below.

On the uplands the wild March wind comes tearing up,
and wrestles with, and would stay us on our path, but, like
blades of corn, we bow before it, sweeping gaily on with our
ranks as yet unbroken.

The wind has other work to do than to hinder to-day, for
with his mighty besom he is sweeping, tidying, setting in order
and making ready the earth against the great high festival of
the year.

Like a rude but willing lover he speeds before, shouldering

aside the mists and the snow, scattering the *débris* of the dead season to the skies, stirring the sap in the kings of the forest, and with his boisterous caress surprising and giving to the air those faint and subtle scents that lurk in a million folded buds, and opening shapes of beauty.

For on the lulls that follow on his stormy outbreaks, one may hearken to, and taste heaven's very breath and whisper, as it airily comes and goes through the tree-tops, or passes like a sigh through the hedgerows, and across the meadows, and the life in one will swell and glow for joy of it; and we thank God for what we are, not for what we have, or may be:

Yoicks!

We are no longer in a line of five, and the ten-acre ploughed field that our leader has selected with a view to testing our wind and muscle, finds out our weak members, so that only two of us reach and scramble over the hedge abreast.

But the smell of the earth, fresh turned, is good; we sniff up great draughts of it, the sort of physic that, for the folks who live shut up in cities, there's nothing better, unless it's an oak-tree fresh peeled. "I'm *blowed*!" says a female voice, in tones of tragedy behind us; but though we sympathize with the speaker we only nod and smile silently, for if we spoke, we should be in case like unto hers, the first word uttered by either being equivalent to a confession that though the spirit is willing, the wind is short.

We want our breath for going, not talking; when work of any sort has to be done, a still tongue is better than a wagging one.

"Primroses!" cries another female voice, some five minutes later, and straightway Jill drops out of the race, and down on her knees beside a pale clump in the hedge, and worships it.

Anak, who has been keeping himself severely in hand in consideration of the feminine legs striving to keep up with him, here lets himself go, and settling into a colossal stride, vanishes in the distance with our nimble Squiffer tripping up his heels.

"O, Dick!" cries Jill, plucking her treasures one by one, "stop with me—we will go through the woods and look for violets."

"All right," I say, coming back, "But I hope you're not going to talk *worries*, Jill; that for an hour you'll try and forget that we've got stomachs, and all that."

"I'll try, Dick," says Jill, stifling a sigh.

"And that you haven't got a sock in your pocket to mend. I say, we'll just be souls for a bit, not bodies. Come along."

After a long search, we come upon our violets, a patch blue as heaven, the only sign of spring visible in the wood to one who knows not how to read between the lines.

To us, who know it all by heart, are visible a thousand delicate footmarks around us, and already we seem to see the white sail of the wind-flower set to the breeze, while trooping across the sward through the shadow-dance of the stripling leaves, come the saucy cuckoo flower, the blue bell, and all the pretty courtiers who serve to swell the woodland court.

I close my eyes, and there seems to come to me the long low murmur, the multitudinous hum of insect, birds, and creeping life, that in full spring and summer time is the breathing out in prayer of the forest, and I open them again with a start to see that the boughs are leafless, that Jill is surreptitiously cobbling at a sock, while her carefully-gathered violets lie disregarded at her feet.

"I thought you were off in one of your moons," she says, putting it away and rubbing her forehead against my shabby coat. "It has been a good morning, Dick, hasn't it?"

"We shall have better," I answer, thinking of the lengthening days.

"Dick," she says presently, "would you think it possible for us to be *worse* off than we are now?"

"Quite impossible."

"The very scarecrows in the fields are not more disreputable-looking than we are?"

"We're about even in looks. But they earn a penny a day—we don't."

"And they get a bit of bread and cheese to eat—don't they, Dick?"

"Yes; and once in a way a bit of fat bacon. But so do we."

"Can't we hire ourselves out as scarecrows to-morrow, Dick?" says Jill wistfully; "because, if not, we shall be—hungry."

"What!" I cry, starting back; "you don't mean to say—"

Jill nods, and her nod means—starvation.

The sun has got behind a cloud, the March wind rushes up into our faces with a sharp sting, keen as that bitter-tasting ill, Poverty; and afar off in the but now azure sky I seem to see the storm rack rolling up, just as over our lives gathers, blacker every moment in its intensity, the cloud of Ruin.

"Let us go home," I say, standing up; "it is going to rain; and why couldn't you have left your sock behind, Jill, and for just five minutes have persuaded yourself that you were a real scarecrow, actually earning the handsome competence of a whole penny a day?"

CHAPTER II.

"The lily-white sall be your smock,
It becomes your bodie best;
Your head sall be busk't wi' gilly flower,
Wi' the primrose in your breast."

SOME of us are leaning through the open schoolroom window looking at the big pear-tree that has elected in a single night to burst into bloom, and now shows a wall of living snow at the end of the long arcade of the espalier walk.

The only moving object within sight is Anak, who flits hither and thither on his stilts, intent on certain bird-snaring operations to be put in force to-night.

"If you please, Miss Jill," says cook's voice from the door, "would you mind stepping into the kitchen for a minute?"

Drawing our heads in suddenly, two of them meet in a sounding crack, which speaks volumes for the emptiness of both, and as we ruefully rub them, Jill's rosy cheek pales, and her breath comes a little short.

"*Higgins!*" she says, and her anxious blue eyes seek mine.

"I'll go with you, old girl," I say, putting my arm round her—"come along, and let's get it over."

"What's up?" says Anak, stooping down and peeping in at the window, having apparently smelt disaster from afar.

"*Higgins!*" says Jill for the second time, much as though she were saying, "The Last Day."

Making a sheer descent of from ten feet to five and three-quarters, Anak takes the window in his stride, and stands in our midst. "Just let him dare to cheek you," he says, scowling ferociously, "and I'll show him. Besides" (he pats Jill heavily on the back) "don't forget that the Chancellor of the Exchequer comes o' Monday!"

Thus supported, Jill sets out, the younger ones following after, down the passage, across the hall, and so to the kitchen.

Flinging the kitchen-door wide, our eyes involuntarily turn to the table. Alas! instead of being piled with goodly sirloin and comely leg of mutton, it is bare; while the fire, O dismal portent, is out.

We heartily wish *we* were, as there slowly emerges from behind the open door (surely in our abrupt entry we must have squeezed him against the wall), a burly man in a blouse, who scrapes his foot, pulls a forelock to us generally, and clears his throat preparatory to speaking.

"I've called, young ladies and gents," he says, "for a trifle off that little account of mine as have been running this two year. The best of j'int's served regler as the clock, and plenty of 'em—and which you'll excuse me, young ladies and gents, but *all that*" (he eyes reproachfully the ruddy counte-

nances, the stalwart bodies arrayed before him) "weren't reared upon nothing!"

We look down upon our mighty limbs with a sensation of shame; never, never shall we be able to take any pride in them again, or regard them as our own, for did not Higgins feed them—*ergo*, are they not his?

"And which, saving your presence, young ladies," says Higgins, seeing the effect he has produced, and warming to his subject, "but not one of my beastesses is in such prime condition as you be, and if I'd only got 'arf of what it cost to rear them calves o' yourn, I should be pretty well able to shut up shop by now."

"At all events," says Hetty deprecatingly, "you can't deny that we do your *j'int*s credit!"

"Or that father paid you regularly for years and years," puts in Jill.

"He did," said Mr. Higgins solemnly; "my cart weren't more regler in stopping at your door, than he were in his payments; but times is changed, and changed for the wuss."

"Why don't you write to *him*?" I say, nodding towards a distant part of the house; "he pays the bills, we don't."

"O! he do, do he, sir?" says Higgins, with a contortion of the face presumably intended to express sarcasm; "it's the fust time as ever I heerd on't. I've wrote to him till my elbers has ached, and I've called on him, but he 'pears to have lost the use of his fingers, and ain't never at 'ome 'cepting to eat his dinner, judgin' by the number of sweetbreads and sich, as 'is stuck-up wally is for everlastin' a horderin'."

"Why don't he come out like a man?" goes on Higgins, waxing warm and squaring pugilistically: "and if he can't pay, *say so*, 'stead of getting behind all you young ladies' and gentlemen's backs, as ain't got nothink to do with it? And if you'll only say the word, miss" (to Jill), "I'll just make so bold as to find my way to that part of the 'ouse where he 'ides himself like a mole, and 'ave the matter *hout*."

A vision of Higgins having it out with our parent tickles me into inextinguishable laughter. But Jill does not laugh.

"It would do no good," she says; "besides, Marshall would not admit you. No, no, you must come again on Tuesday, and between now and then we will see what can be done."

"And meanwhile," says Hetty coaxingly, "couldn't you, dear, good, kind Mr. Higgins, send us a little bit of roast beef for dinner to-morrow? How would you like to have to go to church twice in one day, hungry, and with *him*?"

"And what a pity," says Anak, with a prodigious wink, "after getting us into such prime condition, to let us, for want of a sirloin or two, come down to *nothing*!"

"Sorry to seem 'ard-'arted, miss," says Higgins, hardening himself resolutely against pretty Hetty; "but I can't do it. And there's one comfort, miss" (he grins broadly), "that if you're 'ungry, *he'll* be 'ungry too—and p'raps 'twill bring un to his senses. And you'll 'scuse me, young ladies and gents all—but you'll stand a goodish bit of bringing down, and"—backing to the door—"I'll call again o' Tuesday," and so departs hastily, fearing his feelings may be worked upon, leaving us literally and metaphorically a heap of ruins.

"We shall be *dead* by Tuesday!" cries Hetty, falling into a chair.

"Let us go and look in the larder!" says Anak, practically; and picking ourselves up as best we may, we follow him.

Alas! it is bare as the kitchen table, and our hearts sink into our boots as we gaze around.

"Hurrah!" cries the Squiffer, dipping his nose into the bread-pan, "here are three large loaves, *stale*—they'll go further than new ones—"

"And here's a pound of butter, and a rind of cheese," says Anak, who has been prowling about, and now returns triumphant.

Three loaves, a pound of butter, a rind of cheese, barely enough for *one*, to last six hungry people three days!

"And a piece of fat bacon," says Hetty, who has also been foraging, and now advances with her treasure-trove.

Bacon! It gives us an idea—simultaneously there bursts upon us the beatific vision of—

"Pig!" and we all, save Jill, shout his name in one breath.

"I've thought of that," says Jill, "but it's too late to kill him to-day, and to-morrow's Sunday; we can't, by any possibility, eat *him* till next week."

We relapse into despair, Hetty taking a seat on the bread-pan.

"If only," she says, "the Chancellor of the Exchequer had turned up to-day—but unavoidable engagements have postponed *that* visit till Monday! Where's cook?"

"Exercising her utmost fascinations on the baker's man," says the Squiffer, who has been to reconnoitre; "at one time she seemed likely to win, but the issue, when I left, was doubtful. Here she comes!"

She does, and—empty-handed.

"O! cook!" cries Jill, in despair, "couldn't you persuade him to leave us anything?"

"No, Miss Jill, I couldn't," says cook, "and what's more, he says he ain't going to call again till his account's settled."

"Is there any other little trifle?" I inquire politely; "if so, pray don't be afraid to mention it."

"Only that if Higgins *had* left the meat," says cook, "'twouldn't have been of much use, for there's no coal; the last bit was used this morning to get breakfast."

"Is that all?"

"The maids are upstairs packing their boxes, Mr. Dick. When the butcher brought no meat this morning they said they didn't mean to stop here and be starved, so they're off, and they're going to sue master in the county court for their wages."

"Where's Marshall?" I inquire; "has any one seen him this morning?"

"He just looked in for a minute when Higgins came," says cook, "then off he went, and I haven't seen him since."

"Hark!" cries Anak suddenly; "isn't that somebody driving out of the courtyard!"

We all rush to a distant grating, and peep. There, sure enough, is the fine gentleman's gentleman driving off in style, with (significant omen!) a large basket beside him.

"Gone to the market-town to get wittles for *him*," says Kitty, with conviction. "It's to be hoped he won't forget some coals to cook 'em with."

"Let's waylay him on his return," says Anak, brightening. "I'll hold him while you empty the basket. He's helped himself often enough to our goods, why shouldn't we help ourselves to his?"

"Dick! Hetty! Anak!" cries Jill, wheeling suddenly round; "he must have got money, *ready money*, or he couldn't have sent Marshall out marketing; and he's there all alone, entirely at our mercy—and—I mean to pay him a visit."

We gasp as with one breath: Jill has, indeed, eclipsed us all. Never in our wildest moments have we dreamed of bringing him to book, any more (we may be sure) than has *he*. Jill must be joking; besides, she is asserting herself pretty well for a girl, and no mistake.

"Don't talk stuff," I say decidedly. "If any one takes him to task I must; you're only a girl, and of course he won't listen to you."

"What came of your appeal to him last time?" cries Jill, facing round upon me; "you've had your turn, now it's mine. If you like to come in as chorus, you can. Who follows?" and she sweeps me aside like chaff (where can she have learned that imperial gesture?) on her way to the door. Chorus, indeed! we shall see.

Astonished, delighted, incredulous, the young ones set off

at Jill's heels, Hetty and I following more soberly, and cook bringing up the rear. Traversing the hall, and a passage or two, we come presently to the padded door that shuts off *his* apartments from the rest of the house, and whence he rarely issues, save on Sundays, or to drive or ride.

Seldom indeed do we pass this portal, and then but singly, and when summoned ; but now, Jill's blood being up, she pushes it open without a moment's hesitation, and we all follow.

The carpet is so soft that our feet, hardened by a long course of matting, seem to sink into it ; not for years have we unitedly walked so softly. The very handle of the second door, too, turns without a sound—Jill disdains to knock—and in another moment we are in the presence of the master of the house.

CHAPTER III.

“ And now, since we're going before the king,
Lord, we will go most gallantlie !”

A SCENT of lilies of the valley ; a suspicion of dried lavender ; a subdued glow of landscapes on the walls ; a conservatory beyond with flowers just brightening into delicate life ; a Stradivarius laid down upon an open page of music ; a pleasant litter of cut and uncut books and magazines ; on all sides the tokens of cultured and refined understanding that are in entire keeping with the delicate hand supporting the head that is turned away from us. I suppose we have senses like other folks, though we've small chance of indulging them : at any rate we pause for a moment on the threshold, forgetting all about its occupant, simply drawing in the perfume and the harmony before us.

Although we did not hear the lock turn, apparently his per-

ception of hearing is keener than ours, for before Jill can utter a syllable, he speaks.

"Is that you, Marshall?" he says: "I was afraid you had gone, and I had forgotten one or two things; the *caviare*, Marshall, and the olives—we are quite out of olives—but I dare say you would have remembered them. And don't be late; I think I could eat a little bit of Strasbourg pie for my luncheon, with a glass of Madeira—though, by the way, the Madeira is getting low, unpleasantly low."

A pause. Apparently he is accustomed to bows, not verbal answers from his man, for he does not turn his head, or appear surprised.

"I am not quite the thing to-day," he goes on in a gently complaining tone; "that *fricassee* of chicken disagreed with me last night, perhaps the sweetbreads stewed in cream were a little too rich—I am inclined, however, to blame the *fricassee*, I have very grave suspicions that it was *not* made from the fowl which I ordered you to have killed, it having struck me as being so remarkably plump—but possibly its sister, or its cousin, or its aunt."

O! ye gods! has he verily and indeed, frittered and wasted into a miserable *fricassee* the fat body, the savoury juices, of our very last barndoor fowl, when we would have frugally eaten him by inches, and picked every individual bone of him bare?

If this goes on much longer we shall explode—simultaneously.

"And I have been upset," he continues plaintively, "by the scandalous conduct of the man *Higgins*. I suppose he will come to his senses in a day or two, meanwhile it is awkward and—expensive. However, I think we shall be able to manage a decent luncheon for Colonel Desart on Monday; the cooking under your tuition is fair, very fair; and the cook is really a most estimable woman—except in the matter of always wanting her wages."

A snort from Kitty at the door should awaken him to a realization of his position, but he evidently attributes it to Marshall ; and this must surprise him, as that gentleman is usually a perfect model of good breeding.

"You can go now," he says languidly, "but surely you have left the swing-door open? I felt a *draught*, a very perceptible draught, down my neck. Take care those young savages don't waylay you on your return, they're quite capable of it—not," he adds, with a fine sneer in his voice, "that I think they would appreciate *caviare*!"

That sneer sends our blood up to boiling-point; but Jill, who has steadily been getting ahead of everybody ever since she got up this morning, explodes first.

"You are right, sir," she says, advancing, "we are not accustomed to such delicacies; neither are we at all afraid of our food being too *rich*, for we have none—therefore the savages have called upon you to-day to ask for some money with which to procure it, some of their *own* money, sir, that you have been so kindly taking care of for them."

The lily-white hand supporting the smooth head, so smooth as to suggest a wig, is removed. Turning more rapidly than he has probably ever turned in his life before, there faces us our latest parent—Mr. Josiah Titmarsh. Our parent, ay; but is he responsible for us? Are we Titmarshes? Heaven forbid! We may be handsome, or the reverse, but *no one* could look us in the face and believe us to have disgraced ourselves with such a father; we should never have held up our heads again had we done such a thing.

As his eye falls on our stalwart, shabby ranks, on our too palatable legs, and Smikelike garments, he involuntarily closes his eyes, and—shudders.

"My nerves," he murmurs gently.

"Yes," says Jill heartlessly. "*You* have nerves, *we* have bodies; and bodies are vulgar, sir, while nerves are aristocratic, and they require to be *fed*."

He slowly opens his eyes, as one who seeks to accustom himself by degrees to some necessary but displeasing spectacle, his gaze gradually settling upon Hetty, as being the least rudely healthy-looking, and war-like of the lot.

"Good morning, Hetty," he says; "you are looking very pretty to-day. And, dear me—you are standing; everybody is standing; pray sit down everybody. And surely I see that very excellent person, Kitty, standing near the door? I have given my orders to Marshall for the day—you can close the door, Mrs. Kitty. Stay! In case Marshall should forget to mention it, the melted butter last night was not *quite* the thing—it should be thick, but not *too* thick. You will remember in future, I am sure. Good morning, Mrs. Kitty."

Alas! for the courage that falters on the brink of battle; the door closes upon her—vanquished.

"And now," says Mr. Titmarsh, rising, "is there anything that I can do for you to-day, Hetty?"

He had better have sat down; a little man sitting, may be as dignified as a big one, but standing up, the master of our destinies is hardly as big as the Squiffer, which *may* account (I don't say it does) for the immunity his wardrobe has hitherto enjoyed at our hands.

"You can give us some money, sir," says Hetty, blushing (surely it is he who should blush, not Hetty), "for I should like a new bonnet—O! very much indeed!"

I wonder how he has acquired his wonderful knack of invariably putting us in the wrong—himself in the right? It is for *him* to stammer, to look ill at ease, to make excuses; yet *why*, in every encounter we have with him, do we feel ourselves to be mannerless, uncouth bumpkins? It must be his eye-glass, or his white hand, or his sneer, or all three together.

But to-day they fail in their wonted effect upon Jill, who has indeed taken the bit between her teeth with a vengeance. I have noticed that when the Devil takes possession of a girl

he doesn't leave her in a hurry, as he does a man—he stops.

"We want money, sir," she says, standing forth as champion, superbly indifferent to such trifling details as short petticoats, bare arms, and the most venerable boots the family owns, "and money we must have; though not for bonnets, sir, or luxuries such as you have here, but to pay Higgins, and to buy—*bread*."

She holds out her hand—open; but Mr. Titmarsh, who has re-seated himself, does not see it.

"Marshall has really behaved extremely well," he says, settling his eye-glass; "it seems he had saved up a few pounds at his former place, and when he found out in how unpleasant a position I was placed by the behaviour of—ah—Higgins, he insisted on purchasing certain necessities out of his own funds for me. I shall of course be most happy to make you sharers in them."

"Savages, sir," cuts in Jill ruthlessly, "especially *hungry* savages, prefer a plain joint to luxuries; and you needn't be afraid of our depriving you of yours, or of waylaying Marshall on his return. It has never been in our line to help ourselves to other people's goods; we leave that to people who can appreciate *caviare*, sir, and olives."

"What do you wish?" he says, stung out of his composure at last, and actually meeting, for a moment, Jill's indignant, flashing young eyes with his own.

"We would like to know, sir, what has become of all the money father left us, and that you, as our second step-father, have the charge of—money, sir, to put the boys into professions, to provide marriage portions for the girls, and to educate us: sixty thousand pounds in all, and Sieviking Court; surely, sir, you cannot have got rid of it *all*?"

He makes no reply, only I think the hand that is adjusting his eye-glass trembles slightly.

"Sixty thousand pounds," repeats Jill; "not overmuch to

divide between a family of ten, but enough at any rate to send us to school, and to feed and clothe us. Look at this!" and by way of practical illustration, and before that hapless youth has the faintest notion of her intention, she has caught Anak by the coat-collar and deftly spun him round within a few inches of Mr. Titmarsh's nose.

Indeed, he is worth looking at. Hercules, not quite arrived at his full stature, and arrayed in a coat whose tails defiantly spurn his waste; knickerbockers, tweed as to the countenance check as to the wake; knees that boldly appear through his stockings, and boots whose upper and under soles have long ceased to be on speaking terms, *may* have made a handsome spectacle, but it is quite certain that Anak, who, in physique, strongly resembles that personage, doesn't.

"*Oh! I say!*" he cries angrily, as on reaching the end of his involuntary spin, he twists himself free, "you *are* going it, Jill, and no mistake!"

At sound of his Boreas-like voice, Mr. Titmarsh winces, and looks around uneasily, as though expecting the walls to come about his ears.

"And look at *that!*" cries the irrepressible Jill (really we all seem to be puppets in her hands to-day), dragging poor Hetty forward, short-frocked, tight-bodied, ill-shod, her charms all too many for their shell, and giving her a twirl that compels her to execute a semi-oboisance—"Miss *Sieviking*, sir, of *Sieviking*, at your service!"

He surveys Hetty thoughtfully—possibly it is occurring to him for the first time how far more worthy of his regard she would be if she were properly dressed.

"So much for the money spent upon our clothes," says Jill, relinquishing her sister. As to our food, what we have been eating for the last year is a present to us from the trades-people, for they have not been paid a farthing during that time. And as to the education" (really Jill is like the brook that goes on for ever), "we have had none save what we got in father's and

Mr. Trevelyan's time. The boys have been sent to no public schools, trained to no professions, allowed to run wild; and what is the result? Poor Will and Kit have fallen into bad ways and gone abroad; the last time we heard of them, Will was earning his bread by breaking in wild horses, and Kit was digging for gold, and—"("Finding nothing but *coal*!" interpolates Anak.) "the rest of us are growing up idle and do nothing—we are rough and ignorant beyond belief; and whose fault is it? The fault of those who have robbed us of our inheritance!"

"Just so," says Mr. Titmarsh, with astonishing spryness, "*those* who have robbed you—you do well to use the plural. Pray how many persons had the handling and entire control of your money before I came to Sieviking? And how are you to prove that the whole of that money had not been run through before I married Mrs. Trevelyan?"

He is speaking in earnest now, and showing his fangs.

"But—but," said Jill, gasping, "it is only since *you* came that money has become scarce, that our education has been neglected, that nearly all the servants have been discharged, and the whole establishment reduced. Both in Mr. Trevelyan's time and Madame's we were well clothed and cared for—"

"And the butcher called regularly twice a week!" puts in Anak, as a clincher.

"Just so," says Mr. Titmarsh, with a smile that infuriates us. (O Jill! Jill! that unfortunate *plural* of yours.) "When I came here things were conducted in a lavish, not to say in a royal, manner, that was positively ruinous. The person then in authority (my late wife) was permitting a style of living entirely beyond your means, and in your interests I felt it my duty to retrench, and have indeed devoted my whole energies to saving you from utter ruin.

"That is a lie, sir!" I cry, striding forward, "and you know it. Our estate was entirely unimpaired when you married poor Madam; things only began to go wrong from the day when *you* set foot in Sieviking."

Mr. Titmarsh turns his eye-glass full on me (he has long since re-seated himself), looks at me a moment, then drops it.

"Ah, *Dick!*" he says slightly. And what can there be in his tone to reproduce my appearance to my own eyes with as much distinctness as though a long glass swung before me?

"Yes—Dick," I say stoutly, "the head of the family in the absence of his elder brothers, and now for the first time about to exercise that authority. For the last time, sir, either can't you or won't you find the money to pay the household bills and provide for the current expenses of the family?"

"I have no money," says Mr. Titmarsh, spreading out his white hands and shrugging his shoulders; "as I was explaining to you just now—Marshall—"

"That will do, sir," I say, cutting him short. "You picked a quarrel with our lawyer very soon after you came here, and appointed your own; but to-day I shall write to Mr. Pitt, asking him as a favour to *us* to come at once and examine into everything—he knows the estate thoroughly. And though hitherto we have been too proud to complain to our relations, who are ashamed enough of us already, things are getting too bad to be hidden much longer, and at the same time I shall write to our unmarried aunt requesting her to come here and meet him."

"Pray do," says Mr. Titmarsh politely; "your aunt invariably—amuses me."

"Meanwhile, sir, we will leave you to the enjoyment of the delicacies you are able to procure out of your pilferings, and we beg to wish you a very good morning."

"Ta-ta," he says, smiling and waving his hand; "I am very pleased to have seen you all—especially Hetty. Will you come and dine with me, my dear, to-morrow? Not that I should advise you to eat more than a very small quantity of anything—a stewed lark, say, or a cutlet—for you require fining down; indeed, whether from gross, or over feeding, there is not the

smallest doubt that, pretty as you are, you run a terrible risk, my poor Hetty, of growing too—*fat!* ”

Not as conquering heroes do we reach the door. Once outside it, we look at each other, divided between wrath and laughter. We may get lawyers, aunts, relatives by the dozen—any vulgar people can do that ; but *he* gets—the last word.

“Nerves, has he ?” says Anak, darkly, as he shakes his fist at the closed door ; “just you wait a bit, and see if I don’t make him *feel* ’em.”

CHAPTER IV.

“Your gloves sall be the marigold,
All glittering to your hand ;
Weel spread owre wi’ the blue blaewort
That grows amang cornland.”

It is Sunday morning, and with all the strength of our bodies and souls we are wishing that it were Monday. On a Monday it is lawful to slay a beast ; on a Monday it is not necessary to keep up appearances ; on a Monday a high personage who does not travel o’ Sundays, such as the Chancellor of the Exchequer, may be expected to arrive ; on a Monday there is no long sermon to whet appetites that are naturally fine. On Sunday mornings we make the one supreme effort of the week to appear *respectable* ; and if we have hitherto found it hard work when we had breakfasted well, and were looking forward to the sirloin of beef and Yorkshire pudding that formed our invariable Sunday dinner, it may be easily supposed that the effort to-day is doubled.

There has been a grand darning of stockings and smallclothes over night, and for once our knees blush unseen, but as a rule we seek to embellish the upper parts of our persons most, as we sit in a square pew in church and our legs are not visible.

Getting into church is the rub ; once there, we draw a long breath, and are thankful.

Anak, as usual, dips his head into a basin of cold water, and carefully combs his hair down in leeks over his eyes ; ties up his boots with inked string, and puts the biggest nosegay that he can get for the time of the year in a place where a button-hole ought to be, but isn't. There is one striking merit about that nosegay—it distracts attention from the rest of his person ; and the eye that is once smitten by it rarely travels any further.

Solomon and the Squiffer make a fine display of clean collar and a handkerchief a piece, with faces and hands to match.

The girls, from some occult recess, produce *tails*, and—one pair of lavender kid gloves between them. Sometimes one has the right, sometimes the left, but neither ever arrives at the dignity of both at once.

When we are all ready, we betake ourselves to the hall as usual—more from habit than any expectation of *his* appearing. Common decency will surely prevent his attempting to look either of us in the face this morning.

On one day of the week only may we confidently reckon on the light of Mr. Titmarsh's countenance ; it is when, in the character of a model and suffering step-father, he heads our procession to church, and earns the admiration, respect, and pity of the whole congregation for the exquisite manner in which he performs his duty.

For people who look at him—and us—regard him as the patient, conscientious, persecuted man, upon whom is step-fathered a scapegrace, troublesome pack, whose one aim and object is to reduce him to an untimely grave, in the same way as we are popularly supposed to have polished off "the other ones ;" and in face of our blooming countenances, and mighty frames, decline to believe that we are badly served by him, or anybody else ; on the contrary, it is *he* who is ridden over by us, rough shod.

Perhaps if *we* had brims to our hats, and tails to our coats

and were fed on *purées* and sweetbreads, *we* should look refined and patient, and interesting, but I rather doubt it; I'm inclined to think they would only make us look hungry. And he has manners, we have none. And manners are better than birth, money, good looks, talent—anything.

"We may as well go on," says Anak, in his fine, loud bellow; "he's ashamed to come out, and no wonder—"

Is he though? Here he comes, with a hat in his hand so shiny that, at a pinch, we may behold ourselves and our many imperfections in it, with a flower in his buttonhole, a coat that Poole may well be proud of, with legs of a delicate grey, and gloves to match, no two vagrant ones that may be yours to-day and mine to-morrow, but a Pair.

Have we wronged him after all, and is the amiable "good morning" with which he greets us another instance of long-suffering charity or sublime hypocrisy?

We mutter something in reply, whether good or bad is not clearly audible; then (the usual Sunday morning formula) he holds forth his hand, Hetty advances, and stepping out together, they lead the van.

Now, why does our elder sister thus make friends with the mammon of unrighteousness? Simply and solely from the force of a habit that, in its old age, like many other iniquitous things, has become respectable.

Every Saturday night of her life Hetty vows that she will not, in the face of the village, walk thus amicably hand-in-hand with him; and every Sabbath-day morning of the year he holds out his hand, and she—takes it. They make a beautifully filial spectacle, entering the church side by side, and he knows it.

It is a good step thither, and on the road Anak is harassed by fears that the upper parts alone of his boots will reach church; but fate is good to us, inasmuch as we reach that bourne in safety, and presently march in single file, admirably adapted to hide our deficiencies, up the aisle, behind Hetty's tail, that, whisking the dust from the memory of John Stodge

and Mary his wife, causes their virtues to unexpectedly shine refulgent.

It occurs to me for the first time, as I follow my brethren, that any stranger seeing us enter, and Mr. Titmarsh heading us, might suppose him to be accountable for us. If so, and he knows it, what exquisite pangs must be his, when he sees any new eye fall upon our shabby, robust ranks !

The way in which he hands Hetty her ancient Prayer-book is a study ; so will be presently his bow in the Belief, his courteous air of attention to the sermon, and the air with which he will by-and-by place five shillings (our money) on the plate.

The usual struggle for corners over, we settle ourselves in our places. Anak takes a sniff at his nose-gay ; Hetty smooths down a stray curl ; Jill, over-careworn for her fifteen years, meditates, or I much misdoubt me, upon Higgins.

Opposite us, superior in point of numbers, though not in size, sit the curate's family of fourteen, once briefly epitomised by Kit as constant perseverance in well-doing.

Mr. Titmarsh lifts its eyes to the tablets, three in all, that line the wall and form one side to our pew ; and our eyes follow his, though we know them all by heart, as well we may, seeing that to their number is due our misfortunes. How many parents have we really had, first and last ?

Duly set down in black and white, yonder hangs the plain unvarnished tale, as follows :—

Tablet No. I. :

"To the memory of Hester, wife to John Sieviking of Sieviking, died May 12th, 185—, aged 29 years.

"To the memory of John Sieviking, who died Nov. 10th, 186—, aged 38 years."

Tablet No. II. :

"To the memory of Rosamond, wife to the Hon. Mark Trevelyan, and widow to John Sieviking of Sieviking, died March 10th, 186—, aged 42 years.

"To the memory of the Hon. Mark Trevelyan, husband to the above, died Dec. 20th, 186—, aged 50 years."

Tablet No. III. :

"To the memory of Amanda, widow of Hon. Mark Trevelyan, and wife to Josiah Titmarsh, Esq., died Sept. 1st, 186—, aged 41 years."

And after the luckless Amanda's death, a spotless expanse of white that I have once or twice observed Mr. Titmarsh to survey uneasily, as possibly thinking that his demise alone is wanting to complete the set.

Or—or—happy thought! (has it ever occurred to him?) to take to his bosom another wife, and *outlive* her?

People come from miles round to see these tablets, our family history is considered such a curiosity. And to our disgust we are often (till our genealogy is explained) taken to be a polyglot family of Sievikings, Trevelyans, and (save the mark!) Titmarshes.

We know not what we *may* be, so it is possible that we shall reckon strange children among us some day. So far as I can see, there is no reason why we should not go on having parents indefinitely to the end of the chapter, for it is certain that for some reason or other the air of Sieviking Court does *not* agree with them. As I have said, it is a popular fallacy that we killed them off; we were two sublimely indifferent to them to harry or molest them in any way. They counted for nothing in our lives; we called them "Sir!" and "Madam!" sternly and invariably; saw their coffins depart with no more regret than the passing one that might be felt by an innkeeper for the strangers who had died within his gates, and cynically wondered how soon the tolling bell would be set to wedding chimes again. Once only did we quit our position as uninterested onlookers and swell with honest wrath; it was on the occasion of the last Madam presenting Mr. Mark Trevelyan with twins.

They (the parents) might dwell with us, spend with us, be recipients of our hospitality, but add to our numbers, engraft aliens upon the old Sieviking stock? Never! We rose up as one man, and decided that such a thing could not be per-

mitted. The twins were themselves of this opinion, and had so much more proper a notion of what was due to us than had their parents, that they died almost immediately; and I will do Madam the justice to say that she perceived the error of her ways, and never repeated the indiscretion either then or during the Titmarsh epoch; and in fact behaved so handsomely about the whole affair, that in process of time we overlooked the mistake. Indeed, in the Titmarsh days we came to regard her less as one of the visitors who were always coming and going at our house, than as a victim like ourselves, and therefore, in a sense, one of us. And yet she was the cause of all our misfortunes, which began upon the day she installed our second mate (see Tablet No. III.) at Sieviking.

We had had merry, good, happy times in the days of our own parents; we had junketted royally through the Trevelyan reign, but with Mr. Titmarsh had come hard times that grew harder and harder with every year.

Hitherto, the establishment, like a gigantic ball that, once set rolling, revolves through the force of its own momentum, had been conducted in the same style as in father's and mother's time, and had remained untouched by the temporary rulers; but when *he* came, the ways of the Court gradually underwent a total change. Our abundant hospitalities ceased, nearly the whole staff of servants was by degrees diminished, the stables emptied, apparently of their own accord, and the grooms and gardeners disappeared as if by magic. We began to understand that there was such a thing as money in the world; hitherto, we had concluded it to be conducted on credit, and supposed that food grew on tables at proper periods, and that clothes were intended to be ordered, and worn, without any intermediate process of putting our hands in our pockets. We thought it quite a joke when tradesmen asked us for money, but afterwards wondered at their impudence, and left Providence, or some invisible person who had hitherto arranged such little matters, to settle it.

When our governesses and tutors were dismissed, we threw up our caps and gloried in our liberty; but began to grow uneasy when new clothes no longer grew on our backs, and our table came to be provided with an effort.

We believed this state of things to be due simply and solely to Mr. Titmarsh's stinginess; but perhaps poor Madam knew better, for she fretted and pined, seeming to wither under his influence, and two years ago died.

Since then affairs have been on a sliding scale; we have actually come to the stage of want, and how much further than that can we go? One step more, and we are over the precipice—*then*—

I rouse myself from my reverie, to find that every one is standing up, and that our amiable vicar is as usual making of himself a stumbling-block in the way of our devotions, and severely trying the risible muscles of such of the congregation as have not from severe exercise acquired perfect control over the same.

He conducts the whole service as though it were a capital joke, which he is enjoying all to himself, and that every moment bursts upon him in some new and irresistible comic light.

He balances himself alternately on his heels and his toes, now boldly appearing, now sinking into obscurity; he smiles at us, beams at us, *nods* at us, talks at us, each sentence beginning with a fascinating smile that becomes more and more ecstatic, till it dies a sudden and unexpected death with the last word of the sentence, beginning it all *da capo*.

Scorning the aid of either book or psalter, he is able to devote his whole energies to making faces at his flock; and though we from long habit have grown accustomed to his vagaries, so are not strangers, who disappear convulsed behind handkerchief and hymn book, or who actually leave the church unable to contain themselves.

And now we are on our knees, and our pastor, instead of

kneeling opposite his desk respectably, is resting his elbows on the side of the reading-desk, and peeping playfully over at us from time to time, every now and then disappearing bodily from our ken, but always coming up smiling, in the literal sense of the word.

Last Sunday he fell into a brown study while delivering the Ten Commandments, and absently sat down on the communion table, requiring to be heavily jogged therefrom by the curate.

Below him, seriously scandalized by his master's conduct, sits Potter the clerk, whose "Grasshusly hear us, good Lord, Grasshusly hear us," has sounded in our ears every Sunday of our lives, and who will doubtless, when we are all dead and buried, be still holding on to its red velvet cushion, turning up the whites of his eyes and murmuring "Grasshusly hear us!"

Though he bears his honours meekly, he has some claim to fame, and is known far beyond the boundaries of his village.

At the age of seventy-six he married his third wife (he has sons and daughters of between fifty and sixty), and, a year after, she presented him with a bouncing boy, whereupon he was copied into all the local papers and covered with glory, though what there is to be proud of in having another mouth to feed we can't imagine.

He occasionally thinks aloud, thus muddling up his responses and his ideas, so that if one day he made some such blunder as did that clerk, well-known to fame, who, on the awful occasion of the Bishop's visit, thus confounded it and the verse he was repeating :—

" And the big 'ills did jump,
And the little 'ills did 'op ;
And all at the coming of
The Lord Bi-shop—"

he would not at all surprise us.

The first lesson has begun, and our vicar is jerking out his sentences by way of an easy accompaniment to his occupation of (apparently) pulling himself upwards towards the pulpit with one hand while he alternately paws over his countenance, and rumples up on end his few hairs with the other.

Our attention is distracted from him by the sudden throwing open of our pew-door by the sexton, and the irruption of two young women into our midst. Every other pew in the church is full; but, thanks to the ravages dealt by matrimony and foreign travel in our ranks, we have several places to spare, two of which the new arrivals fill. To Mr. Titmarsh, whose room is by us considered better than his company, and consequently gets plenty of space, is apportioned one damsel; the other falls to my lot.

There is a curious look of old acquaintanceship about them; they are familiar, yet unfamiliar, to our ken. I find myself rubbing my eyes to make sure that I am not asleep, and even Mr. Titmarsh, whose face is a study, at the plebian contact to which he is subjected, puts up his eye-glass as though some glimmer of recollection had crossed his mind.

In the two red-faced, flat-waisted Dulcineas before me I seem to behold a stout Jill, a lean Hetty; then, certain familiar landmarks dawning upon me, I begin to see daylight. The girls' Dolly Vardens! No wonder they look us in the face like old friends—no wonder they should gape widely where they should meet in amity, and exchange the kiss of peace where fashion demands that they be divorced: for were they not made to fit Sieviking waists and busts, and shoulders?

If I wanted my revenge on Jill for her rebellion of yesterday, I have it. She is scarlet, so is Hetty; their eyes are glued to their doubles, who—I am almost certain of it—*know*.

A new gown is not such an everyday affair in our family that we should forget one in a hurry; and by the green smudge on yon shoulder, and the rent across the biggest rose on the other,

I could swear to them as to my own personality, and I can't but think these gentle female hinds are as well aware of whose they were as I am. It is a mean trick served us by the Chancellor ; but what has come to Anak ? Is he taken violently ill, or has the sight of the girls' doubles proved too much for him ?

He straightens himself out presently ; but after a glance at Mr. Titmarsh, whose eyes are cast heavenward, while his lips fervently murmur the responses, he gets a worse attack than before, and is evidently being tickled by some exquisite idea that but becomes the more delicious in every light by which it is viewed.

We envy him his tit-bit—he might share it with us, for we are all unfeignedly and truly wretched, and what is worse, look it.

Talk about blighted affection, remorse, or a murder on your mind ! give me, for sheer, downright, broken-hearted misery of countenance, an empty stomach. And for aggravation of the suffering commend me to the knowledge that you're going home presently to a bare board.

But to-morrow is Monday—Monday, when we shall dine fatly and well on chucky, who is intelligently enjoying himself to-day.

Our vicar is now in the 'pulpit—instructing us.

I wonder why the highest teaching of the Maker's noblest work, man, falls so infinitely short of the meanest truth taught us by the hand of Nature ? A green leaf, a flower, a caterpillar, will show us the Deity in all His grandeur, when the many words of man but obscure Him from our sight.

I hearken to our vicar's ramblings, and doubt. I look at Anak's nosegay, and believe. Up to the age of six years old I had faith also, but at that period it was rudely destroyed. Left alone one day I broke a valuable plate in two pieces, and as I stared at it in terror, there flashed across me what I had been taught that very day, viz., how faith could remove mountains, and how, whatever one prayed for, one would obtain, if

only one prayed and believed hard enough. So I turned my back on the plate and prayed hard, harder, *hardest*, still, whenever I looked over my shoulder there was the broken plate, and there was I. I had not a grain of doubt; I felt *certain* I should see the two pieces joined together again without so much as a crack to show what had happened; but at last I stopped, disappointed and ashamed. And after that the story of the mustard-tree and the mountains was just a fable to me, no more.

"*I say!* girls," says Anak, in a loud whisper, as at length we rise to depart, "what do you think of your" (a smothered explosion) "your doubles? They're as like you as two peas—and as green. She *might* have taken the smudges off while she was about it."

"On one point," whispers back Hetty, with red cheeks and flashing eyes, "I am resolved—that if ever I can afford the luxury" (she clenches her one gloved hand with such vigour that its cover splits in two), "I will quarrel, irretrievably quarrel, with the Chancellor of the Exchequer!"

CHAPTER V.

"I think he bought his doublet in Italy, his round hose in France, his bonnet in Germany, and his behaviour everywhere."

COLONEL DESART has arrived; so has the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Delectable smells testify to the hospitable cares of host Titmarsh below; a single glass and a half-filled decanter announce the utmost extent of ours above.

Nevertheless, if the refreshments we provide are limited, our preparations are not; with the hearty and united good will of the whole family have we dusted, swept, and garnished the blue bed-chamber from top to bottom, while, if elbow-grease is good for anything, then should our old furniture be equal to new.

It is our aim to appear as prosperous and easy as our cir-

cumstances permit, as we are perfectly aware that well-to-do people are always able to drive harder bargains than poor ones.

There was a time when we received the Chancellor with open shame of countenance; when our moneyed friend was smuggled in at one back door, only to be hustled out at another; when our words were few and brief in our dealings with that illustrious personage; but finding that our pride disastrously affected our pockets, and having long ago discovered that business is the first law of self-preservation, we are now affable, cool, wide awake, and if in the course of transactions shortly to be described any one gets done, I venture to think that individual does not answer to the name of Sieviking. I wonder why, until to-day, it has never occurred to me how like Joseph's unlucky brethren we must look, as we stand in a semi-circle, each behind his or her heap, our eyes fixed upon the autocrat seated in our midst? In one respect alone we differ, that in *our* sacks, alas! are no gold or silver cups; we devoutly wish there were, as the Chancellor's eye disparagingly rests upon the wares, carefully arranged best side uppermost before her.

"Is that all you've got for me to-day?" she says, rubbing her nose irritably.

There—the murder is out—our Chancellor is a *she*. And why not, pray, seeing that there was once a female Pope, and if a female Pope, why not a female Chancellor?

"You should have sent for me before, Miss Jill," she said severely, "and not waited till your clothes was all dropping off your backs; if there's one thing I can't abide more than another, it's going home with my purse *full*."

It is an ill we could bear a good deal of, and our mouths water as she produces from her reticule a purse through whose meshes gleam many shining images of Her Majesty, and at the opening of whose steel lips, lo! there seem to come tumbling into our laps all manner of small luxuries and delights, while new boots and pantaloons grow upon every bush,

"There!" she says; "I brought all that for *you*; ain't it a pity to have to take it all home again?"

It is, indeed. There is the money, here are *we*; the Chancellor desires to leave it, we ardently desire to receive it; where then is the hitch?

We look down, sighing, at the little sad-coloured heaps at our feet, and the hopes that have gone up like rockets come down like sticks, for they tell us that, though we *might* compass silver, gold is altogether beyond us. Indeed, our visions assume a copper-coloured tint, in which even a bonnet becomes doubtful and a pair of boots impossible.

"I think we had better get to business," says Jill, with the calmness of despair.

"I don't call it business; I call it *rubbish*," says the Chancellor, with a superlative hitch of the nose, as she pounces upon Anak's heap, as being nearest to her, and holds up to our derision the garment to which he has pinned his fondest hopes.

"Now I should like to know," she says wrathfully, "what any decent woman could give for *that*?"

That is a pea-jacket that she ruthlessly holds up to daylight, and through which she thrusts her fingers, seeming to snap them, so to speak, in our faces.

"Pray, what would be the use of my letting you have it," says Anak loftily, "if it were of any use to me? And coats ain't made to poke your fingers through, but to be *worn*."

"I pity them as wears this'n," says the Chancellor, ineffably; "I'd better go over everything in one heap, for I see I shan't be able to give you more than a pound for the lot."

A pound! O! ye gods, something must be done to appease the Deity. Something is.

Jill comes forward, bearing the decanter and glass. No matter whence that wine comes, purloined though it be, it is our own, and we offer it as such.

In all dishonesty do we press it on our guest, in the ardent

hope that it will fuddle her brains to a pitch incompatible with her own interests, and consequently vastly in favour of our pockets.

"It ain't none of your cowslip wine, is it?" she says, eyeing the outstretched tumbler suspiciously; "that *were* stuff, and no mistake."

Indeed it was. Who would believe that those yellow bell-fries, made for bees to swing in, could ever be decocted into so vile a potion as that which we once brewed? Though I am inclined to think our sloe jam, in nastiness, beat the cowslip wine out of the field.

We assure her that we have had no hand in the making of *this*, and she takes a sip on trust, then another, and another. Apparently she is more used to Madeira than we guessed. A glass a piece to *us* would make us generous to the extent of giving away our heads, but upon her it has a contrary and disastrous effect.

At one glance she is sharper, more superhumanly keen at detecting holes, rents, and stains than ever; at two glasses she becomes acrimonious; at three, she sets down any error made in her own favour to the fault of our hospitality, and cheats unblushingly on the plea of her wits being obfuscated.

"It's good stuff," setting down the empty wine-glass by her side. "I only wish there was summut as good *here*." She looks at the bundles. "Ah! the only time I ever got anything worth having was when Miss Hetty there sent for me, unbeknown to anybody, and let me in herself at the washus door—which my perfession is a respectable one, and no think to be ashamed on."

"*We* know," I say, cutting her short; and indeed have we not good reason to know of the Chancellor's first visit? Did not our superfluous coats, hats, waistcoats, and boots, disappear as by magic one fine day, while on the following Sunday Hetty came out in a gorgeous black silk, for which she could never honestly account?

Putting this and that together, adversity *alias* Mr. Titmarsh having sharpened our wits, we give our sister no second opportunity of again turning an honest penny at our expense, and now reap every man the benefit of his own.

"A shilling," says the Chancellor, throwing the pea-jacket behind her, "which means a dead loss to me of sixpence.

"Two shillings," says Anak firmly.

"Couldn't do it sir," shaking her head virtuously; "to rob oneself's nigh as bad as robbing one's neighbour—one and three, pr'aps—"

"One and nine," says Anak, in the tone of one who alters his last will and testament; and "One and six," says the Chancellor, in that of the parson who says "Amen."

"One old hat, a penny," she continues in dull recitative, and no one gainsays her; indeed the person who wears it deserves a penny far more than the one who sells it.

"One weskit (what there is of it), tuppence; three pairs of knickerbockers, sixpence—"

"Hold hard!" cries Anak, "the cotton used for darning one pair alone, cost more than that, and it's all there, every bit of it!"

"Sevenpence," says the Chancellor, "and not a farthing more, if it was ever so. One pair of gaiters thrown in for luck." She suits the action to the word.

"There will be no throwing in for luck to-day," says Anak, getting rather warm, as well he may, seeing that he has not advanced so far even as the sole of one of his new boots; "three-pence, if *you* please, ma'am."

"Threeha'pence," says the Chancellor, promptly, "and for the rest of the lot,"—she swiftly rolls up the odds and ends, and throws them behind her—"sixpence, which makes two and tenpence 'alfpenny; and as I always pays my way as I goes, why here's the money, sir—and now for the next lot."

But for the first time in his life, Anak is backward at taking the money held out to him,

Nodding his head three times, with his eye sternly fixed upon the Chancellor, he stalks to where his cast-off wardrobe reposes, and unearths a something that he proceeds to unfold with care.

"You thought because it was turned inside out I'd forgotten it, didn't you?" he says crushingly, "and it's two and elevenpence halfpenny, not two and *ten*, and you know it."

"La," says the Chancellor, affecting to consider, "so it is to be sure—my poor head—it's all the fault of that sherry wine."

"There!" says Anak, unfolding his treasure, and, so that none of its beauties may be wasted, proceeding to array himself in it; "so you thought you were going to get all that *for nothing*, did you, ma'am?"

Whence can he possibly have attained it? out of what forgotten cupboard has he dug it? It is of a bright gold-coloured satin, embroidered in flowers, large as to their size and glowing as to their tints, which have to all appearance liberally shared in the good things partaken of by their owner during life.

"Never say after this that we don't give you anything handsome," say Anak, watching the Chancellor's eye that has for a moment brightened, but now gets professionally dim again.

"H'm," she says, pursing up her lips; "it'll take a deal of cleaning, and them weskits ain't fashionable now-a-days, folks don't wear 'em."

"Because they can't afford to buy them," says Anak grandly. "I know what Farmer Coles would give for a thing like this to wear at a tenants' dinner, if *you* don't."

"It's small," says the Chancellor disparagingly; "very small for a man as means eating a good dinner. A Cheap-Jack might fancy it; 'twould be a regular 'tisement. Half-a-crown, sir, though it's a wronging of all them little innocent B's at home to give so much for it."

"Four shillings," says Anak, taking off the waistcoat, and putting it under his arm.

"Couldn't do it, sir ; half-a-crown or nothing."

"Then you shan't have my bundle at all," he says, rolling up the same, and marching to the door.

Apparently she is used to the proceeding, for she beholds his progress with equanimity, and it is only when he is nearing the end of the passage that she makes any sign.

"Two-and-nine," she says, without raising her voice. Autocrats need never storm ; their whispers are always audible. He does not turn, but walks very slowly.

She is too crafty to give him threepence a step, so waits.

"Three-and-six," he says, making a feint of proceeding.

"Three shillings," she says, with spirit, "if 'twas the last words ever I spoke, which, with the two and elevenpence halfpenny, makes six shillings all but a—"

"I'll owe you the halfpenny, ma'am," says Anak, with a broad grin, as he takes the three bright two-shilling pieces out of her half-closed hand ; and sure enough, though the Chancellor tries to father the debt on each of us in turn, when she departs he actually owes it her still.

"And now," she says, turning to Hetty, "if there's anything worth taking away, I expect it'll be in *your* bundle, miss."

But Hetty does not respond to this affable advance ; the Dolly Vardens plainly rankle in her mind, sheer necessity alone inducing her to stand by her wares. What will not beauty do, however, to obtain a new bonnet ? Needs must when the devil drives.

"It's going to be a bad day all round," says the Chancellor irritably ; "five shillings is the utmost I can do for *you*, Miss Hetty, and that's the truth."

Hetty's rosy face lengthens. Abandoning costly wrath, she condescends to point out the many excellences of her goods, to which we all come in chorus with such remarks, as "Look at the elegant buttons upon it," "Just see its beautiful little waist" ! &c.

"That's just where it is," says the Chancellor, with asperity, "you young ladies has got such little bits of waists, and such wide shoulders, there's no gal hereabouts as your clothes 'll fit. Your figgers is the very moral of what your poor ma's was—not that I ever seed her, 'cept when she was driving and sich. The inside of this house weren't for the likes o' me in *those* days."

She puts her head on one side, retrospectively; can it be that, though late in the day, our Madeira is turning up trumps?

"Seems but yesterday," she continues, "that I saw you all a walking into church, two and two, dressed just like little princes and princesses, and your ma in a *mory antick* as 'ud stand on end—the very feller of the one I've got at home for visiting!"

Jill groans; how many holocausts of our garments have not gone to rear the fabric of that stupendous *mory antick*?

"Don't be downhearted, miss," says the Chancellor, misunderstanding Jill's involuntary sigh, "and I'll give you eighteenpence for your bundle" (never, never has Jill's been known to fetch more; she is indeed attired with such a strict regard to economy that she could scarcely part with anything without returning to the costume of the first parents), "and better luck next time—which makes six-and-six between you, young ladies."

"Five shillings won't buy a bonnet," says Hetty, in tones of despair; "neither will eighteenpence get a tooth stopped."

"That it won't," says the Chancellor promptly, "though if you'd try and find a few more things, miss, I'd be 'appy to leave you as many sovinks as I've just give you shillings."

Hetty stands irresolute; her gaze wandering downward, first over her own pretty figure, then over the walls and ceiling, as though seeking an inspiration or—old clothes. Still thinking, she moves from our midst, a very Venus of sober maiden meditation.

"Mr. Sieviking, sir, your turn," says the Chancellor.

"H'm ; your cricketing flannels and shoes, I see." I toss them towards her with my foot, scorning to explain that as I can't pay my subscription to my club, I shan't require them this year.

But before my goods are finally appraised the door opens to admit Hetty. She bears a suit of black with which we are unfamiliar, and which is indeed in far too good a state of preservation to have ever belonged to any of us.

"*No !*" says Anak, going off into a roar, " why you've never—you've never—?"

"*Yes,*" says Hetty, facing us all with a very red face, and a firmness that nothing short of a coveted new bonnet could endure her with ; " he called me *fat*, you know."

An insult to a woman's looks will excuse anything ; nevertheless. we do not approve, and Hetty knows it.

"Ten shillings," she says, holding out her hand, and, wonder of wonders, the Chancellor disinters a little beautiful bit of gold, and without a word of chaffering, hands it over.

"We're beginning to get on," says the Chancellor briskly. "Now then" (looking round), "any old carpets, mats, pillows, curtains, or some of that bed furniture as set you young ladies up in Dolly Vardens, and made you feshionable for above a year?"

And she jingles the contents of her purse before our eyes and ears in a way that the Arch Tempter himself couldn't surpass. Fired as by one impulse, and demoralized possibly by Hetty's good luck, we all rush different ways, the Chancellor cheering us on as we appear before her at intervals with all the movable goods that we can lay our hands upon.

"For heaven's sake !" cries Jill, "leave yourselves a bed to hide yourselves in when the last of your clothes are gone." But we heed her not. "New lamps for old" is our cry, and for the first time in our lives we begin to understand a little of what it must be like to *gamble*.

"You're quite sure that's all?" says the Chancellor, at last,

from behind the mound we have raised, and which renders her totally invisible to us.

We are quite sure, unless indeed we throw in our own substantial bodies, "for luck."

"Then I may as well put it all up," she says.

"Pay us first," says Anak the practical.

She does. It is long indeed since our palms have pressed such riches, and we strut about with feelings that Croesus might have envied.

"The best clearing out I've ever had in *this* house," says the Chancellor complacently, as she draws from her reticule a neatly folded sack, which she places on the ground at a distance, then proceeds to stoke its capacious mouth with hats, coats, curtains, and what not, cramming them down with the skill of a practised hand.

It is always a fascinating sight to us, and we stand around watching the performance. The Chancellor stands barely five feet high; the sack, filled, is nearly six, and the incompatibility between them seems to strike her disagreeably, as she ties up its mouth with string, standing on tiptoe to do it.

"Sam's waiting for me outside," she says dubiously, "but I ain't ekal to getting it downstairs—I wonder now if there's any young gentlemen here as would like to earn an honest sixpence by carrying it down for me?"

Her shrewd eyes fall upon Anak's stalwart proportions. Will he rise to the bait? He does.

Sixpence is sixpence, however obtained, and muscular exertion is all in the day's work. First securing his fee, therefore, Anak advances, and with one well-directed kick sends the sack spinning to the farther end of the room, himself following it; so do we, the Chancellor bringing up the rear, a lady at large bearing a reticule. Somehow the notion tickles our fancy, or perhaps the money has got into our heads; at any rate we clean forget all about *him*, as we sweep turbulently along to the head of the stairs, standing back as Anak, col-

lecting his energies for one superhuman effort, sends the sack flying down the wide staircase and past the archway leading to our step-parent's rooms.

Past it, did I say? Not quite. Who are those figures that, approaching from the side just as the sack is spinning past the opening, catch its whole force full front, and fall back upon each other like overthrown ninepins?

Our haggling has taken longer than we thought; luncheon is over, the guest is departing, and Mr. Titmarsh was speeding him on his way, till the sack sped him—in the wrong direction.

We are too petrified to move; one behind the other we stand—a very Jacob's ladder of heads, with the Chancellor topping us, and peeping over to ascertain the cause of our sudden transfixion.

Mr. Titmarsh recovers himself with difficulty; his guest, with more ease advancing in search of the cause of his catastrophe, comes to a full stop opposite—Hetty.

"Pray forgive this unfortunate *contretemps*, Desert," says Mr. Titmarsh, crooking his arm in that of his friend, and seeking to draw him back to the rooms they have just quitted; "these young people, I see, are on their way from the store-room. Um! ah!" (he bows towards the sack that, having turned a somersault or two, now stands rakishly on its head); "*potatoes*, I imagine."

The many bumps and excrescences visible might pass for the useful domestic bulb before mentioned to an uninitiated eye, but to ours they represent nothing of the sort.

"And an uncommonly pretty little housekeeper you've got," says the Colonel, resisting that backward pressure, and likewise fixing his eyes on Hetty. "By Gad! Titmarsh, but you've got a fine family here, and never said a word about it either; sly dog!" and he gives Mr. Titmarsh a dig in the ribs that makes that gentleman, fresh from his bruises, wince.

Before he can reply, before Hetty can even blush any harder, or Anak withdraw his leg, still outstretched, as when the

catastrophe froze us all as we stood, a small, shrill, terrible voice uplifts itself from our rear.

"And begging your pardon, gentlemen, but yon's not potatoes, but old clothes, all bought and all *paid for*. Which I'll thank you, young man" (to Anak), "seeing as how I've give you sixpence to convey that sack off these premises, and business bein' business, and another party waiting for me round the corner, to be a *moving on*, if *you* please."

With all our faults let it never be said that we are dishonourable. Had not that hot sixpence above stairs been pressed into Anak's receptive palm he might now leave the Chancellor to struggle herself and sack out of sight as best she may. As it is, he advances like a man, and the kick being pretty well taken out of him by now, shoulders the sack and marches off with it. The Chancellor, descending gingerly, opens her reticule, and fishes therefrom several cards, which, on passing Colonel Desart, she presents to him with a bobbing curtsy.

He acknowledges the same with a bow and puzzled air.

"The best of prices given," she says solemnly; "ladies and gents waited on in their own houses, or if living at a distance, parcels sent to my address (see card) punctually attended to, and the full value of the goods remitted by P.O.O., which one card is for yourself, sir, and the others for distribooshun among your friends. Good morning, sir. All bought" (she waves her hand towards the direction the sack has taken), "and *all* paid for. Good day."

CHAPTER VI.

"Have more than thou showest,
Speak less than thou knowest,
Lend less than thou owest,
Ride more than thou goest,
Learn more than thou trowest,
Set less than thou throwest."

FOUR days have elapsed since our grand *fiasco*, and we are

beginning to hold up our heads again, being considerably helped thereto by the blessed consciousness of having something in our pockets besides our hands. Talk about the elixir of happiness, who wants it when he possesses ready money? *We* don't. For a fine independence of spirit and a stiff backbone give *me* a full pocket. To know that one is going to be ruined to-morrow is nothing in comparison with being penniless to-day.

We buy our cut of mutton, take our glass of beer with the best, and Anak, chancing to meet the Chancellor of the Exchequer one morning near the village public, treats her magnificently out of her own money.

Hetty has got a smart bonnet and tippet, Jill's tooth has been made equal to new, while the rest of us need no longer fear unkind remarks when we turn our backs to our enemies.

Anak alone has disappointed all expectations; the new boots in which we expected him to devour hill and dale being conspicuous by their absence, while our curiosity is severely exercised by his frequent and mysterious disappearances from our midst. We are divided between the belief that he is carrying on a courtship at a distance, or that he has hired himself out as a day-labourer, the latter opinion being strengthened by the fact that he always returns out of breath and—thirsty. The girls, however, lean to the former notion, as he has been once or twice overheard, in a voice fearfully out of tune, *humming*; and does a young man learn to sing, pray, to please his sisters? Not a bit of it; they are born to play the accompaniment.

And meanwhile our aunt's chariot-wheels drive heavily, and neither she nor Mr. Pitt are to be expected yet awhile. The latter is on the Continent, putting salt on the tail of an individual who has eloped with all his partner's worldly goods, not forgetting his neighbour's wife, while our favourite aunt is laid up with a quinsy. It's to be hoped she's not too ill to have a

hamper packed, else, I'm afraid, she will fare badly when she comes.

Perhaps Mr. Titmarsh will offer her a seat at his table : for ourselves, we have not accepted his handsome offer of sharing the delicacies (bought by our own money) with him, and which appears to us about as reasonable as was the Government allowance once made by Lords Goderich and Howick of two razors per annum for shaving the ebony chins of the West Indian negroes, who have no beards ! Neither have we appetites for *caviare* and olives ; therefore we have not caused his cruse of oil to diminish.

It is while we are awaiting our visitors that an extraordinary circumstance happens, and for the first time in our lives we are made (to all appearance) the victims of a supernatural occurrence.

It must be about twelve o'clock one night, the fourth after the visit of the Chancellor, that I wake with a hideous discord sounding in my ears, which proceeds apparently from the garden.

I open my window, but can, of course, make out nothing, though the whereabouts of the intruder is easily guessed by the fearful row he is making. Some fool playing us a practical joke, I suppose ; shall I throw my boots at him as a gentle hint to be gone ? No, for he might stick to them, and being my only pair, I should find it awkward, so I put them on instead, and sally forth to investigate.

Looking in at Anak's door, I find he has already descended, and on the stairs I fall in with Solomon and the girls, who have come out well rolled up in blankets to see the sport.

It is pitch dark in the garden, the only light visible being that which in a distant window illuminates a small white-clad figure, who uneasily peeps forth into the night.

Marshall is here, of course. His orders have been simple ; "Ascertain who is making that infernal noise, and eject the

person instantly," and, with so much sound to guide him, the carrying out of them should surely be simpler still, only that, like Mrs. Glasse's, before cooking his hare, he must first catch it.

It booms above, around, in the midst of us; it *even* has the effect of ventriloquism, and seems to proceed from each of us in turn; is here, there, everywhere at once, which is precisely why the author of it is so hard to catch, and why, when we think we *have* pinned him, we find we have only violently seized upon one another.

"I've got 'im!" cries Marshall, exultantly, as a blast is blown into his very ear, and he clutches, and rolls over with—into a neighbouring flower-bed—me.

"Here he is!" says Anak from a remote corner, simultaneously with another blast, and away we dash in hot pursuit only to hear, when we have reached the spot, a dolorous howl from the place we have just quitted.

"Oft in the stilly night" is his theme, but owing to its rapid and enforced flights, and to the fact that he oftener than not hits upon the wrong note, but won't proceed until he has found the right one, and invariably takes up the burden of the song exactly where he laid it down, he has not reached the end of even the first verse.

O! ye heavens, what a rich treat must he not be furnishing out to Mr. Titmarsh yonder, to whose sensitive ear a raised voice even is discord, and a false note in music the most exquisite agony! His soul must be simply raked by the excruciating din; and verily, our visitor, whoever he may be, is revenging some of the injuries inflicted upon *us*, by the tortures he is imposing on *him*.

Were we not so exasperated at the performer's skill in eluding us, we might leave him, in consideration of the misery he is inflicting on our step-parent, to continue his solo indefinitely; but our blood is up, and we are determined to welch the individual who, in spryness, wind, and dexterity, is more than a match for us all. He is playful too—such as dealing us unex-

pected digs out of the darkness, knocking our hats over our eyes, and tripping us up in odd corners, which amenities we attribute to one another, and return with interest, a free fight being imminent, when Kitty, bearing the lantern for which we have frequently and loudly called, sheds a little light upon the scene. We cease pommelling each other, not letting go, however, in case either of us should have got hold of the real Simon Pure, our grasp relaxing, and our wrath giving way to honest laughter, as the absurdity of the situation strikes us—laughter that is abruptly checked as Marshall, in a voice of ecstasy, cries "I've got the villain! Here he is! I see you sneaking away, you warmint!" These remarks being jerked out spasmodically, as he drags forward a figure whose remonstrances and objurgations he does not even hear in his excitement; a figure that is so muffled up as to resemble a small mummy set on end, whose face is entirely hidden by the comforter swathed below it, and whose gloved hands most assuredly contain no instrument of torture.

"Yah!" cries Marshall, giving it a violent shake, while half-a-dozen rude hands tear the comforter aside, to display the features of—Mr. Titmarsh.

"O! sir," says Marshall, dropping him, and recoiling horror-struck and fit to fall himself.

"So it is you, sir," I say, almost as amazed as Marshall "who have been playing us this trick?"

And yet that it is *he* who has been playfully tripping us up, and prodding our ribs, we can *not* believe.

"I? No, indeed," says Mr. Titmarsh patiently; "and I think I have some right to complain of the treatment that I have received. I have been tripped up, and jumped upon (I believe two of my ribs are broken), and one of my front teeth is missing, and I have swallowed a whole cigar. I merely strolled out to see if I could be of any assistance."

But we eye him suspiciously. Why has the discord ceased the moment he is caught?

"You can play, sir," says Anak; "we've heard you—often" (on bird-snaring nights we have not scorned to hearken to his faultless fiddling), "and you see there is nobody here" (he lifts the lantern, and throws its light around) "but ourselves, and you, and Marshall. *You* know best whether *we* can, or not."

"I do play," says Mr. Titmarsh, with a certain dignity, "but not the cornet. You need not come with me, Marshall," as that abject person follows him with stammering apologies; "you can remain, and—catch the right person."

And the muffled-up figure glides away.

"That *was* a shake you gave him, and no mistake, Marshall," says Anak comfortingly; "but I think I'm answerable for his tooth—unless anybody else has lost one? I know I knocked one out of somebody's mouth, for it cut my hand."

"And I did hear something crack when I doubled somebody up," I confess guiltily; "but perhaps it was only his watch, not his ribs—though the sack the other day may have loosened *those*, you know."

"We'll look for his tooth to-morrow," says Anak; "I think it'll be in the flower-bed—don't you see something moving over there?" And he goes scurrying away as—

"The—cheer-ful—hearts—now—bro-ken—"

(we only wish the performer's wind was) is jerked out in the distance.

Away we go, the same old game beginning over again, with this difference only, that at the end of another half-hour we have caught nothing, not even a Titmarsh. We got out of temper, spiteful even, the girls' stifled laughter adding fuel to our wrath.

Shall we retire, leaving that beast, who is now blowing away in the distance apparently as fresh as when he began, in possession of the field?

Never! daylight is bound to deliver him into our hands, and

forming a *cordon* round the lawn, so that escape is impossible, we sit down on the kitchen chairs brought to us by Kitty, and await the morning with such patience as we may.

Sick of failure, we take no notice when impudent blasts are blown up our noses and down our throats ; we even nod after awhile with one eye open.

But when daylight *does* come, disclosing us to each other with noses of the tint that the young lilac buds will be by-and-by, it discloses nothing else—the garden is empty.

Evidence of the night's scrimmage is, however, visible in plenty, in the shape of trampled flower-beds, torn-off buttons, scraps of check clothing (O ! Jill, Jill, why were we not born cherubims ? What a lot of darning and trouble it would have saved !), the sole of one of Anak's boots, and, as I live, after a little search, Mr. Titmarsh's tooth !

At breakfast, another war is waged, but only of words this time, the girls being convinced that a real ghost has paid us a visit, since, how was it possible that anything of flesh and blood could escape, the rest of us sticking to the belief that it was a practical joke most cleverly played.

Anak stalks about, truculently vowing to break every bone in the fellow's skin when he catches him—a threat which causes Kitty, who overhears him, to be seized with a fit of laughter that sets our suspicions pointing towards *her*, as being possibly at the bottom of the whole thing.

A very little reflection, however, disabuses our minds of the idea, and we spend the forenoon in improvising lanterns by fixing tallow candles into wooden frames. An insufficiency of light last night possibly aided in our discomfiture ; to-night there shall be no chance of seizing one another by mistake.

Girding up our loins, we swear by all our gods that to-night we will catch him or perish in the attempt ! and in order to take time by the forelock, ten o'clock is the hour fixed for the rendezvous in the garden.

It is disappointing, therefore, to find Anak at nine o'clock

taken so severely ill as to be compelled to swallow a monster jorum of brimstone and treacle (the only medicine he ever takes), and retire to his bed, whither he is attended by Jill, who carefully tucks him up, and watches over him till he falls asleep.

At ten we assemble, girls and all, but the disturber of our peace does not turn up till eleven.

At the first note of discord, seven matches fly to seven candles, which are swung aloft, but taller tapers than ours are required would we see the author of it, who is apparently half-a-mile or so above us.

We gaze at one another blankly, for the moment believing that we are indeed the victims of a supernatural occurrence ; then, as by a sudden inspiration, set off as fast as our legs will carry us, to that corner of the garden especially belonging to Mr. Titmarsh, and upon which his windows look.

Exactly opposite them, and at a right angle with the wall, stands a tall poplar, from the summit of which proceeds, or we are much mistaken, the strains which but now we attributed to the clouds.

“ My—pretty—Jane—my—darling—Jane !”

he puffs out laboriously ; and Mr. Titmarsh, who has approached the window at sound of our approaching feet, claps his hands to his head, with a gesture that is almost grand by reason of its despair. Whereupon I vow that, if the cornet has hitherto been possessed of one demon of discord, seven infinitely worse ones now enter in, jarring even *our* by no means sensitive ears to a pitch of madness.

“ There can’t be no mistake *this* time,” says Marshall, “ there’s but one right of way out of a tree, and that’s by the foot.”

“ D’you suppose we mean to wait till he comes down ?” I inquire ; “ he will be *fetched* and kicked off neck and crop—” I pause, remembering that only one out of our number is able to climb that tree, and that one is missing—Anak.

"A ladder," suggests the Squiffer; but on search being made for it, that useful belonging is found to be missing likewise.

There is no help for it; I must fetch Anak. I go indoors, and to his room, in which a subdued light is burning. There he lies, his broad back turned towards me, his abundant locks half hiding the pillow, evidently dead asleep.

I stretch my hand to wake him, but draw it back again—it is bitingly cold out yonder, and if he is taken out of his warm bed, may he not take a chill, and die of it, as poor Job did last winter, when he was compelled to get up, because his house was on fire? Vengeance on our ghost is not worth a funeral. I leave him in peace, and go out again.

After all, last night was better than to-night . . . there was at any rate a little excitement in it . . . and we grow to loathe the very name of Jane, and will never in our lives ask any one of that name to meet us, if we know it.

We watch till chilly night has given place to chilly dawn, till we are numbed in body, sore in spirit, and only prevented from ingloriously falling asleep by the ear-splitting solo going on over head; but when, at length, daylight *does* come, it shows us the poplar-tree—empty. Whereupon, windy threats, objurgations—bed.

CHAPTER VII.

"Crack! went the whip, round went the wheels,
Were never folks so glad,
The stones did rattle underneath
As though Cheapside were mad."

A DISH of primroses at one side of the table, a dish of blue and white violets at the other. A space at the top, a cheek at the bottom, and a pipkin full of flowers before every plate, at which each may take a sniff between every mouthful, and so keep his appetite within bounds.

"And remember, boys," says Jill impressively, as she steps back from the table she has been setting out with care, "that

though you will be invited, nay *pressed* to partake of the roast mutton, that you are all to prefer the cold cheek, just as if you hadn't been eating pig for the last fortnight till you loathed his very name."

"But supposing Pink May has not had one killed lately," says Anak, in a grumbling tone, "and would like a bit of cheek, mayn't one of us have a slice of mutton instead of her?"

"There is the cheese," says Jill severely; "mutton can always be curried or hashed—cheese can't. I know what I shall think of the person who eats mutton—that he's a *greedy*—"

"Master's compliments," says Marshall, appearing suddenly in our midst, "and he's going to meet Miss Sieviking at one o'clock, and will Miss Hetty like to go with him?"

"And pray who told him that any one was coming?" says Anak, facing round; "you have been listening at keyholes again, I suppose—"

But Marshall, standing at attention, his eyes fixed on Hetty, vouchsafes no reply.

"Miss Hetty's going to the station with *me* to meet our aunt," I say, looking up; "you can tell Mr. Titmarsh so, with my compliments."

Marshall touches an imaginary hat. "Very good, sir. Master's going to drive White Bess in the phaeton, and I've orders to take the spring-cart for the luggage."

"Then you'll have to draw it," says Anak fiercely, "for you won't have Billy."

Marshall, with a very faint approach to a smile, again touches an imaginary hat, and vanishes.

"He thinks he's going to have Billy, does he?" cries Anak, with the force of a pent volcano, when the man has really gone; "we'll soon see about that."

"The sneak!" I burst out, every whit as enraged as Anak; "trying to do the civil, and butter over Pink May with his

polite little attentions, as he does all the rest of our relations—is she going to pay him a visit, pray, or *us*?”

“Take a back seat on our own phaeton—*never!*” cries Hetty, with flashing eyes; “just as if I were a boy in buttons!”

“I wonder what she will say, on finding none of us at the station to meet her?” says the Squiffer; “and he will tell her a fine pack of lies about us, coming home!”

“I mean to go,” says Anak; “and what’s more, I intend to *bring her back* with me!”

And he disappears with a mien that betokens some portentous deed.

“Then you’ll have to bring her behind you on a pillion,” I say, following him, and possessed by the same idea as he is. But turning the corner of the stables, we run against Marshall coming away from them, and though his face is absolutely expressionless, it does not surprise me to find the stable-door, when we reach it—locked.

“The villain!” cries Anak, in a fury. “I’ll go after him, and make him give the key up.”

But I snatch at his flying coat-tail, and pull him back.

“What’s the good?” I say; “he’s reached the house by now, and handed it to Mr. Titmarsh. Don’t give him a laugh at our expense, but let’s see if we can’t have one at *his*.”

Anak fuming, mounts his stilts, and looks in at the window upon Billy, who is munching carrots, blissfully unconscious of the degradation in store for him.

“I could get in fast enough,” says Anak ruefully; “but how to get Billy out—there’s the rub.”

He drops to the ground, and stands chafing, while I go to the coach-house to reconnoitre.

It is not locked, for the excellent reason that Marshall knows we can’t draw either carriage or cart five miles to a station, and five miles back.

“Hooray!” cries Anak, seizing a stilt, and whirling it

round his head. I've got an idea—we'll do him yet, Dick, see if we don't—*Jemima!* ”

I throw myself back against the wall in a fit of laughter, that must cause Mr. Titmarsh, who can easily hear it from the house, to think that we are taking our check pretty hilariously.

“You can't do it,” I say. “Think of poor Pink May's feelings—you couldn't do it, you know,” and I relapse again into helpless mirth.

“If aunt's the girl I take her for,” says Anak, “she won't throw her own nephew over for fifty Jemimas. Anyway, we'll see.” And he marches off at the rate of ten miles an hour.

Left to myself, Anak's idea tickles me to such an extent that I am still propped against the wall, incapable of movement, when he returns in triumph, leading a very old, broken-winded donkey, whose coat, formerly white, is now of a dingy drab colour.

“You'll never get her as far as the station,” I say, walking round her; “or if you do, you'll have to carry her home again. Better see if you can't borrow a pony!”

“Who'll lend us one, unless we pay for its hire?” says Anak; “and there's more work in Jemima than you think. If I start within half-an-hour, and walk her all the way, she'll get a good rest there, and come back at a spanking rate.”

“Poor Jenmy!” I say, looking at her as she stands, a perfect monument of misery, her four hoofs brought together beneath her, while her back describes a Cupid's bow. “She don't look very spanking now!”

“I'll give her a carrot before she goes,” says Anak hopefully, “and as to the harness, I'll go and fetch Billy's.”

And he disappears into the interior of the stable, but returns almost instantly, empty handed and—Profane.

We laughed too loud, and too soon; Marshall probably is laughing in the house yonder, at our expense, for in locking the stable door he has not neglected to lock that of the harness-room also.

We stare at one another ; our faces blank as Jemima's, but no idea comes this time to our aid till the Squiffer appears upon the scene, and is informed of the position of affairs.

"*Ropes*," he suggests promptly ; "there's any amount in the washhouse,—I'll go and fetch 'em."

He is back with an armful directly, and in a trice the spring-cart is drawn out into the courtyard ; Jemima is backed into it, and we all set to work, splicing, knotting, tying, till she is fixed between the shafts so tightly that, even if she wanted to tumble down, she couldn't.

Now, by all the laws of propriety and seniority, it is my plain duty to prevent any member of the family disgracing himself and us, by making such a public exhibition of our poverty, or putting Pink May to the blush, by asking her to travel in such a vehicle as this.

But the notion of Mr. Titmarsh's face, when his eyes fall on Anak drawn up before the station door, is so exquisite, that I can only hold my sides at every fresh knot, and, indeed, become so helpless at last that Anak begs me to fetch from the school-room a cushion for aunt to sit upon, and a comfortable mat for her feet. When these are arranged, and the stoutest of the ropes fixed as reins, Anak, leaving Solomon and the Squiffer in charge, goes indoors to make his toilette.

The best hat possessed by the family is well brushed and inked, a clean collar, whose points set fiercely up on either side of his chin, is produced, and buttoned on by Jill, while, against our better judgment, he persists in arraying himself in a plaid waistcoat, in the fob of which he places, with its attendant seals, the one relic of value with which we have never parted, viz., father's hunting watch, which is about as big as a moderate-sized warming-pan.

When all is completed, he looks at himself over his shoulder, and pronounces the whole effect to be "fine."

But, alas ! so intent have we been on adorning the upper stories of his corporeal dwelling-house, that we have entirely

neglected his lower, consequently it is with a rude shock that our eyes fall on the carpet slippers with which he concludes.

His hoofs are far too big to be accommodated by any of *our* boots, so he must e'en go in slippers, or stocking heels.

"I needn't get out, though," he says blankly, "and nobody'll see—but if they did, I could say I had got the gout, you know; people with gout always wear slippers, as every one knows."

"But if you don't go on to the platform," says Hetty, "*he* will snap up aunt before you've time to look round; as you can't get out yourself, you must take somebody who can. Why don't you go, Dick?"

"Why don't you go yourself?" I say; "in that new jacket and hood of yours, folks would look at *you*, not Jemima."

"The Squiffer must go," says Jill, interposing, "he's so light and nimble, Mr. Titmarsh won't have a chance against him."

So the Squiffer is promptly scrubbed and made decent, and having down our utmost to embellish our envoys at our own expense, we descend to the courtyard, where the miserable Jemima waits, her attitude one of utter supineness and dejection.

As Anak majestically seats himself upon the board, it irresistibly occurs to us how much more capable he looks of carrying Jemima, than Jemima does of carrying him.

"Now for the carrot," says Anak, as if it were a specific for all ills to which donkey flesh is heir, and, sure enough, after partaking of that delicacy, Jemima stands erect, and even lifts her tail.

Seizing this favourable moment, Anak, gathering up the ropes with an air, drives off, the Squiffer jumping nimbly up beside him, while our shouts of laughter pursue them both by way of a God-speed.

After which we fetch a rake, and carefully obliterating all traces of wheels, retire to the tallet to watch the march of events.

We do not find the time of waiting long, as we regale ourselves with anticipations of the treat in store for Mr. Titmarsh, and the discomfiture of the out-witted Marshall. Presently we hear him approaching, and, peeping carefully over from beneath the projecting eaves, we see him, quite unconscious of our vicinity, draw two keys from his pocket, and apply one of them to the stable door.

We can only see the top of his hat, but *that*, I swear, expresses a sniggering triumph. Listening intently, we are able to follow him accurately through the process of harnessing, first White Bess, then Billy Button—the latter resenting the indignity by lashing out at him with as much sense and vigour as if he were a Christian.

He reappears presently, and goes whistling towards the coach-house; and now that we can see his face, there *is* a smirk upon it. It vanishes simultaneously with the ceasing of his whistle, though, when he opens the coach-house door and looks within.

“O! be sugared!” he cries, jumping back a step, and scratching his head; “what ever have those young warmints been up to with that cart?” he adds, in loud soliloquy; “I *were* a fool not to lock that door, too, but I know’d they’d got no pony, and unless they drored it themselves, the young asses”—(Marshall little knows how very nearly he has hit the mark)—“I didn’t see how they was goin’ a matter of ten miles. They’ve poked it away somewhere just to spite me—*darn’em!*” he adds piously, and departs to rummage every out-house in search of it.

We contain ourselves with difficulty, when presently he returns, vociferating fearfully, and empty handed. He proceeds to drag out the mail phaeton, and harness White Bess thereto, after which he locks the stable door, viciously, and puts the key in his pocket, thus extinguishing the golden idea which anon occurred to me of myself starting off on Billy to see some of the fun of the fair.

He has scarcely got into his drab overcoat, and arranged his hair by means of a pocket-mirror and comb, when Mr. Titmarsh, who owns the one virtue of punctuality, appears upon the scene.

Mounting delicately to his place, he settles the rug about his legs, and gathers up the reins preparatory to starting.

"If you please, sir," says Marshall, touching his hat, "I can't take the spring cart, it's gone; but I daresay I can hire something at the station to bring back Miss Sieviking's luggage in."

"Is the pony gone too?" says Mr. Titmarsh turning sharply, and in a voice of thunder; "I thought you told me you had locked the stable door?"

"So I did, sir, and Billy Button is in there all safe."

"Then jump up behind," says Mr. Titmarsh, recovering his equanimity; "I can bring back the light luggage with me, and you can follow with the rest."

Will he though? I'm inclined to think that it is *he* who will have to follow, not Marshall; and though he may bring her luggage back, we are very much mistaken if he brings our aunt.

Puffed out with this pleasing hope, however, he drives off at a smart pace through the bright, beautiful morning; and when the echo of his carriage wheels have quite died away, we lie down on the hay, and *roll* in an agony of mirth and expectation, while Billy down below, at the sound of our voices, kicks up his heels responsive.

CHAPTER VIII.

"She's backit like a peacock,
She's breastlit like a swan,
She's jimp about the middle,
Her waist ye weel may span."

A Distant sound of approaching wheels—wheels of the mail phaeton or the spring cart—which?

Up to this moment, betting has run high as to which equipage aunt will return in, Hetty and Solomon being convinced that the rope harness and Anak's carpet slippers will prove too much for even *her*, Jill and I affirming that she is not the good fellow we take her for, if she leaves him in the lurch, or makes him look any smaller than circumstances and Jemima have combined to make him look already.

The steps are White Bess's . . . they are turning in at the gates, they are here . . . we draw in our breaths, and lean through the open tallet door at the imminent risk of our necks . . . it is he, and—Pink May?

Scarcely. In the precise order in which he departed, Mr. Titmarsh has returned, himself before, Marshall behind; he has not even a travelling-bag to show as the fruits of his journey.

In one respect only is there an alteration, his face, but now so suave and genial, is perfectly white with rage, and it is with the iron hand of the coward and the bully that he saws at Bess's mouth as he pulls her up at the stable door.

The cigar is between his lips still, but it is out, and if our lives depended on it, we could not restrain the smothered giggle that escapes us at sight of his furious discomfiture.

The sound, slight as it is, reaches him, and, looking sharply up, in the act of descending, he beholds our four grinning countenances clustered high above him.

He sets his teeth hard, with a curse, or I'm much mistaken, the cigar falling, bitten in two, at his feet, then walks away into the house, while Marshall, with a faint twinkle in his eye, proceeds to unharness Bess, and lead her into the stable.

It is beneath our dignity to question him, though we are dying to know how Anak managed to achieve his brilliant victory, so when he comes out again, the twinkle having spread into a grin that embraces his whole countenance, we let him depart to the house unmolested.

It is not in reason to expect Jemima back for another good half-hour, therefore we dispose ourselves to wait with such patience as we may. Imagine, therefore, our amazement when, at the end of ten minutes, we again hear the sound of approaching wheels, and precipitating ourselves down the tallet stairs, reach the courtyard in time to be rewarded by a Sight.

Standing up in the cart, his legs apart, his dilapidated hat cocked rakishly over one eye, his coat flung wide to give air, lavishly displaying the waistcoat and seals, his elbows squared and lifted to his ears, thereby hitching up his already short trousers to the extent of showing half-a-yard or so of striped stocking, with the most ineffable look of triumph on his naturally truculent countenance that mortal ever accomplished, comes Anak and his prize, drawing up at the stable door with such a flourish as almost lifts from his legs the luckless beast, whom, by some necromancy, he has persuaded into going five miles an hour.

Have you ever seen a real Paddy going to the races in a real shandydan? Because, if so my description of Anak's appearance is wasted upon you, for you have already seen him.

"I've *got* her," he says, in a tone of the most intense complacency; and sure enough, though for the moment we have scarcely seen our aunt, so completely does Anak fill the canvas, there she is, with ringlets out of curl, bonnet awry, a false plait bobbing down her back, an extravagant long-tailed gown that would amply cover all the six of us, yet with it all, our dear Pink May, whom we dearly love, and who dearly loves us.

"O! dear boys and girls," she cries, as half-a-dozen outstretched hands lift her down into our midst, while we all proceed to shower upon her energetic salutes, "how *rejoiced* I am to see you all again!"

"Upon my word you're smarter than ever," I say; "but why didn't you come back with *him*?"

"I'm afraid he is very angry," she says, looking grave, "but of course I couldn't come back with anybody but Anak;" and then she begins to giggle—and certainly none of us err on the side of silence, as in a body we escort her back to the house.

In the schoolroom, the Squiffer gives me a full, true, and particular account of the morning's doings as follows.

"We walked nearly all the way," he begins, "and led Jemima, getting there about ten minutes before Mr. Titmarsh arrived. You should have seen his face when he saw Anak drawn up before the station door, though I feel sure he thought he'd only come for the luggage, and just at that moment what should that wretched Jemima do but set up heehawing with all her might, which made everybody grin, though why folks should always smile when an ass uplifts his voice, and take no notice when a horse whinnies, I never could make out.

"Well, Mr. Titmarsh came on to the platform, and just as the train was signalled, he caught sight of—*me*.

"The train came in, I got to her before he did, but had only just time to tell her that Anak was waiting for her outside, when up came Mr. Titmarsh with his best bow, and taking her shawls and things offered her his arm to the carriage, throwing a word or two to me in the style of the affectionate stepfather, who had brought me to meet her.

"When we got outside, Mr. Titmarsh very adroitly contrived for her back to be turned to Anak, and was leading her towards the phaeton, when Anak, who was standing up in the cart, fearfully excited, jumped out of the cart, and just as Pink May had got her foot on the step, Anak clutched her hand and put it under his arm.

"'You're just coming along with *me*, aunt,' he said, and wheeled her round before she could draw breath.

"'Of course I am,' she said, not seeing the situation a bit; 'we're all going back together, there's just room for the four of us in the phaeton—'

"‘I’ve brought a—a carriage for you,’ said Anak, ‘and—’

"‘That is for the luggage,’ said Mr. Titmarsh suavely (a lot of people had gathered round, and were looking on grinning). ‘Allow me—’ and he again endeavoured to assist her into the phaeton. ‘Jump in behind, boys; Marshall can bring back the luggage in the, ah—cart.’

"‘We shall go back as we came,’ said Anak, nodding ferociously, ‘except that Miss Sieviking will go with us—won’t you, aunt? That is to say, if you’re not too proud;’ and he pointed towards Jemima, who at that moment set up hee-hawing again with all her might.

"She looked past it, over it, everywhere but at it; then said, ‘I don’t see any carriage, dear!’

"‘Well, then, the *cart*,’ said Anak sturdily, and thereupon took her up in his arms and lifted her bodily into it. Then up he got and drove off, actually getting a-head of Mr. Titmarsh,—I thought he would have *burst* with triumph!"

Here she comes, Kitty and Jill beside her, Marshall behind.

"Master’s compliments," he says, "and he’s waiting dinner for Miss Sieviking and the family in the dining-room.

We stare at him as with one eye, scarcely believing the evidence of our ears.

"*He* is going to dine with *us*!" says the Squiffer shrilly.

"Yes, sir; he’s waiting for you, sir," and he throws the door open, and stands aside.

"*Good* Lord!" I say, "why there won’t be enough mut—" I pause abruptly.

"Doesn’t he always dine with you?" says Pink May, standing up and arranging her curls.

"Oh! of course," I say drily, "and eats exactly the same food as we do: his appetite is not at all delicate—not in the least."

"I say!" says Anak, entering so hurriedly as to flatten Marshall against the wall, "White Bess is very ill—in a fit or something; you'd better go and see to her at once" (with a nod towards Marshall), "and tell Kitty to give her a bran mash while we're at dinner."

For a moment Marshall hesitates between two duties—to succour White Bess, or to wait on his master. Bess wins the day; he vanishes, Anak slipping out after him, returning, breathless and complacent, just as the last of us is seating himself at table.

Grace pronounced, Mr. Titmarsh looks around him in such calm expectation of somebody appearing to remove the covers, that involuntarily the Squiffer hops up and performs that ceremony.

"Where is Marshall?" he inquires, in amazement at the absence of that official; but we do not heed him, we are marvelling whence comes the comely turkey that sits at ease before him, and the noble sirloin of beef that graces the foot of the board.

Our flowers are all gone; our modest bit of mutton hides itself at the side of the table, while our pale and melancholy cheek occupies an abased position on the sideboard.

Mr. Titmarsh's suavity, temporarily mislaid on his return from the station, has quite returned; he beams upon us, the model of the courteous host and affectionate stepfather, from the head of the table, as he commences to carve, daintily, the dish before him.

"A small slice of turkey, my dear Miss Sieviking?" he says. "March is very late for turkey, I admit, but these young people like something substantial."

"Oh, my!" says the Squiffer in an audible aside; "dinner napkins!" and he appreciatively unfolds his, and sets to munching the piece of bread he finds inside it.

"A little piece won't by any means do for *me*," says Anak in the same tone, looking at the turkey with the eyes of a lover.

"Would you oblige me," says Mr. Titmarsh, addressing us generally, "by ringing the bell for Marshall?"

Anak rings with a will, but no Marshall appears.

"Doubtless he will be here directly," says the host, whose urbanity is not to be dashed by trifles. "Meanwhile, Miss Sieviking, allow me." And he rises, and makes his way to her with the delicately-carved slice of turkey, reaching her side at the same moment as Anak appears at the other, bearing a bit of mutton.

"Your favourite cut of mutton, aunt," says Anak, repressing with difficulty the impulse to smack his lips, "with Yorkshire pudding, you know—Kitty made it on purpose for you."

"So it is," says Pink May, returning an eye of favour on the mutton, and a coquettish smile of refusal on Mr. Titmarsh: "and I never get such good mutton anywhere as I do here."

"Excuse our getting up from table," says Hetty, coming round with the potatoes, while the Squiffer bears the sea-kale, and Kitty brings up the rear with the Yorkshire pudding, "but we are used to waiting on ourselves."

"And only too pleased to have anything to help ourselves to," says Solomon, producing the pepper and salt.

"A little turkey, my dear?" says Mr. Titmarsh, to Hetty, keeping his temper, and struggling still to retain the post of master of ceremonies.

"No, thank you, sir," says Hetty politely; "I'm afraid turkey is conducive to *fat*. A bit of cheek, if you please, Anak."

"Never mind the cheek," I say handsomely, "you shall have some mutton, Hetty." And she does.

A whisper, exchanged between Anak and myself, and passed on by telegraphic signal to the Squiffer and Solomon, has determined *our* course of action, so that when Mr. Titmarsh, dissembling his rage, offers to me the oft-refused slice of

turkey, I accept it (to the amazement of Jill and Hetty), at the same time mildly hinting that I could manage more slices than one.

I don't think he is used to carving; he has to stand over, and wrestle with the bird before he can deprive him of a leg, and it is almost with a look of despair that he again requests one of us to ring for Marshall.

"I'll see if I can't find him," says Anak the willing, but presently returns, saying, "he can't see him anywhere," which is strictly true, though, if he had told us all he had *heard* of that worthy, he would have retailed language as little likely to edify us as it is to benefit Bess and Billy Button, who at present are the sole recipients of it, as declaimed from the harness room into which Marshall is securely locked.

"He said he was going to the stable, as Bess was ill," says Pink May.

"But the stable door is locked," says Anak.

Mr. Titmarsh, struggling fiercely with a wing, answers nothing, though for the angry red that flashes into his face, Marshall will eventually, I think, have to pay.

Having helped me, he looks at the expectant countenances of Solomon and the Squiffer, and—blesses them.

"Beef?" he says, something of his fine veneer of politeness been scratched off by now, and signing towards the neglected sirloin, which wastes its sweetness on the desert air.

"Turkey," says Solomon, in a hollow voice, which, if his stomach matches, the whole of that bird would be but a sop thrown to it, not worthy of mention.

By the time the Squiffer is served, Anak is quite ready to have his plate refilled, and when that is done mine is also empty: and though he politely expresses a hope that Mr. Titmarsh will take a mouthful himself before attending to us, the latter merely shakes his head (he is too furious by this time to trust himself to speak), and attacks the body before him more desperately than ever.

After all, he has courage. I'm certain his arms are aching fit to drop off, and that he hasn't taken such severe exercise for years.

"It does give such a zest to one's appetite," says Anak as he empties his second plate, "to know that what we are eating is *paid for*!—and now for the beef."

Not in vain has that bullock become beef, as Anak quickly proves. We can't beat him, but we are not far behind, and when at last the four of us lay down our knives and forks, an empty dish at the top of the table, an unsightly bone at the bottom, testify to the prowess of our teeth.

"That's the best tuck-out we've had since you came to Sie-viking, sir," says Anak. "I wish you'd ask us to dine with you every day; don't you, Dick?"

Mr. Titmarsh, who has eaten his bit of turkey on a stone cold plate, vegetableless, sauceless, breadless, unable, through his labours, to get in a word with our aunt, who is indeed so amazed at our gastronomic feats as to do nothing but stare at us fascinated, now sees his way, and beaming benignantly upon us, says, in an affectionate manner,—

"I am only too pleased for you to enjoy yourselves, my dear young people; indeed it positively makes me feel quite *young* again to see it."

"Only, perhaps, when *you* were young, you weren't kept on such short commons as we are," says Anak (really frankness is very indecent); "even if we'd got it, we couldn't eat as much as this every day, you know."

"I should think not," says aunt, who looks, I fancy, somewhat shocked.

We must seem gluttons to her, and no mistake.

"Are you quite sure that you have finished?" says Mr. Titmarsh, with no sarcasm in his voice; "as if so, *Kitty*, perhaps, will remove the dishes."

Anak again undertaking the part of Mercury, our sole female domestic makes her appearance. She has a dish-clout over

one shoulder, a duster adorns the other; she comes in like a lion, and rampages, so to speak, among the dishes, serving Mr. Titmarsh, for instance, though late in the day, with vegetables—over his shirt front.

Having plumped a rhubarb pie down opposite Mr. Titmarsh, and a pudding opposite Hetty, she retires to the sofa, seats herself upon it, and with crossed arms, and eyes fixed upon the ceiling, awaits further orders.

Mr. Titmarsh surveys her for a moment in petrified silence, then—

"You can go, Mrs. Kitty," he says, "we will ring for you when I require you."

"Am I to go, Miss Jill?" she says, still intent on the ceiling.

"Yes, if you please, Kitty."

She vanishes with a whirl, a bump, and a bang, the latter causing Mr. Titmarsh to hold his head between his hands for a full minute. He does look very pale, to be sure; one might pity him if one had not, through him, smarted severely in one's pocket,—the most feeling portion of the human belongings.

Pink May looks at him with a certain pity, and at us, I think, with disapprobation.

Yes, he is right in calling us savages, for savages we are, pure and simple. Why cannot we, for the nonce, bury the hatchet as gracefully as he does, and if only for the sake of our visitor, permit things to go smoothly?

But we cannot. We are truthful and straightforward to an extent that must appear to him simply brutal, and we never had any manners with which to smooth away the force of our natural failing. Therefore, when we have cleared the dessert at one fell swoop, and drunk our glass of ginger wine apiece, finding it as impossible to talk to aunt before *him*, as it evidently is for him to properly exercise his fascinations before *us*, we retire in a body, leaving him master of the field.

Once outside the door, away we go, free as air, with a mighty "Whoop!" for which the turkey and beef are mainly responsible. Our spirits run high, for why should we not dine as well to-morrow at his expense as we have done to-day?

And, if by encouraging his little attentions, Pink May can assure to us many more of such feasts, why, we will put it to her in the conclave by and by, to be held in the school-room, that it would be downright cruelty to *us* to positively discourage them.

CHAPTER IX.

"When devils do their blackest deeds put on
They do suggest at first with heavenly shows."

HALF-AN-HOUR, an hour, two hours go by, and still Pink May comes not.

We have grown tired of waiting for her in the school-room, and one by one have not scorned to take a peep at her through the window, the whole of one hand, the half of her cap, and a good portion of her peacock-like train being full in view.

Once, or I'm much mistaken, I see a pocket-handkerchief lifted to her face, and presently Anak falls back upon us breathless with the intelligence that Mr. Titmarsh has got her hand.

Jointly and severally we refuse to believe him, but by the testimony of our own eyes are convinced; there is his sickly paw enfolding her little rheumatic one, while she, well, may we blush for her, permits it.

We never meant his little attentions to go so far as that.

"It's my belief," says Anak, in tones of awe, "that he's *proposing* to her!"

Ousting him from the place of honour, I perceive that Mr. Titmarsh's hand has come to assist its fellow, and that between them

he is stroking Aunt's very softly and tenderly, finally relinquishing it as though it were an egg and might break.

"What *lies* he must have been telling her!" I ejaculate, and at that moment perceive that she is standing up to depart, so we all rush back to the school-room to receive her.

We hear her long train with its dozens of steel buttons banging against the walls on either side as she comes; but when the door at last opens to admit her, we do not, as usual, hasten to meet and surround her.

"We had quite given you up," I say, politely placing a chair for her. "Mr. Titmarsh's society is evidently too agreeable to be left in a hurry; but, of course, if you came on a visit to him, not us, we shall know what to expect in future."

Poor Pink May, with a blush, and simper, and shame all in one on her faded cheek, trifles with the follies on her watch-chain, and looks down. "Your cap is all on one side, aunt," says Anak, "and your nose is as red as your ribbons. Have you been *crying*?"

She puts up her morsel of a handkerchief to the little turned-up nose that in her youth must have marred all pretensions to beautyship, and in honest concern cries, "*Is* it red?"

"Very," I say briefly, "but what have you been talking about—us?"

"I have been upset, dears," she says, jumping as it were at my question, "I have been hearing all about things—and they seem in a sad state, though poor Mr. Titmarsh has been doing everything in his power to right them."

"As it is all his doing, he ought to be able, if any one is," I say. "May we inquire what he proposes to do?"

"Things have come to such a pitch, he says, that he declines to have the sole responsibility of your affairs on his hands any longer. He has asked me to furnish him with the addresses of the principal members of the family, that he may request them to meet the family lawyer here, and decide on what is best to be done."

"We will write our own letters, thank you," I say proudly, "and he is rather late in the day with his hint about our lawyer; he was written to weeks ago, and may be here any day. And you are not surprised to find that we are beggars?"

"I was quite knocked down by the intelligence," says Pink May. "I *cried*, for though I had thought for some time things weren't quite straight, I had no idea of this; but it seems it has been going on ever since your poor father died, hard as Mr. Titmarsh has tried to economize and retrench."

"Have you any more fables to tell us, aunt?" I say, laughing bitterly, "because, if so, tell us them as fables, but don't expect us to believe them."

"I do not think you are fair to him," says Pink May, with some rebuke in her tone; "indeed, I have seen enough of your behaviour to-day to be sure that you are not—you make no allowance for his broken health and spirits, and should remember that, even if he is not always in your midst, he never ceases to labour for your welfare."

"The results of such labour are certainly brilliant," I say, looking round, "but go on, aunt."

"He says he knows he is looked upon as an interloper here, that he would long ago have relieved you of his presence, but that he knew he could serve you best by staying; now, however, that no further efforts of his can stave off the end, he means to accept a post offered him abroad."

"As what?" I inquire.

"Missionary."

"He is perfectly safe," says Anak. "No one, not even a Zulu, could stomach *him*."

"He means to work and slave night and day for *you*," says Pink May, the tears dripping down her red nose; "he has spent all his little savings here in trying to retrieve things, and will have to begin the world over again; but he says he does not mind that, he would be more than satisfied if you would give him a little . . . *lo . . . love . . .*"

She is sobbing now, her ringlets meeting over her nose, her Dolly Varden cap eclipsing her left eyebrow, the queerest little outside, with the warmest lining to it, that ever left the hands of the Creator.

"Poor soul!" says Anak, giving her such a pat on the back as sets all her little gewgaws dancing a jig; "she can't help it if he is more than a match for her, can she?"

"I suppose he will want to receive our *love* personally," I say dryly; "does he propose to return?"

"When he and all of you have made enough money to keep up Sieviking decently, you will all live here again together; meanwhile, he proposes it should be let for a term of years."

"He has arranged it all very nicely," I say quietly.

"And was it because he was so sorry for *us* that he held your hand so long, aunt?" says the Squiffer, fixing his little sharp eyes on her face.

Pink May starts violently, and her cheeks become as red as her nose.

"There!" cries Anak, in one of his loud whispers, "I told you so—he's *popped*."

"Are we to look upon you as our future stepmother, aunt?" I inquire gravely.

"*Dear* boys and girls!" she cries deprecatingly, "who ever thought of such a thing? But he says he has always had a great regard for me; it seems he saw me once at a ball when I was a young girl"—("He must have been there in the capacity of waiter," I mutter.) she draws herself up, and looks down—"when my complexion was so exceedingly delicate, that I always went by the name of Pink May, and he never forgot me, you know . . ."

"That *was* a stroke of genius," I say, in unconscious soliloquy. "How we have underrated that man, to be sure!"

"He remembers the very dress I wore," continues Pink May; "pale pink crape, with blush roses. . ."

"Aunt," says Anak, fixing her with his eye, "did he *kiss* you?"

"O! Anak," she cries, looking really shocked, "how can you?—"

"Because, if he had," says Anak, lighting a tallow candle, and marching up to her, "we could none of us ever have kissed you again, that's all. Not that I suppose it would be any great loss. Good night."

CHAPTER X.

"Grave old plodders, gay young friskers,
Fathers, mothers, uncles, cousins . . .
Families by tens and dozens."

"SOME people begin small, and end up big—others begin big and end up small. *We've* done the latter," says Hetty, sighing.

"If only father had invested in the Three per Cents," says Jill.

"Or, as I said to Mr. Titmarsh last night," puts in Pink May, who has been politely sent to Coventry, and sits, the image of dejection, a little apart, "if only my poor dear sister were alive now, how different everything would be, to be sure!"

I smile grimly, wondering if he felt grateful for a wish that struck so profoundly at the root of his *raison d'être*.

"What I want to know is," I say, looking round, "whether we are doing any good by writing these letters to people who never came near us when we were respectable, and who are not likely to wish to contaminate themselves now we are beggars."

"Something must be arranged—some provision made for you, dear boys and girls," says Pink May hesitatingly.

"You mean that we are to be distributed among the family as foundlings, I suppose," I cry fiercely, "but that we never will be, as long as we have the use of our hands."

"Never!" echoes Anak, "so long as there's a crossing to be swept, or an honest penny to be earned by holding a horse."

"I see no good in it," I pursue ; "if they come, *he* will only sugar them over and make fools of them, as he has done of other people, and we shall be insulted and deluged with good advice, and nothing else. We will write no letters to any one," and I tear in half the sheet of paper before me.

"I think, dears," says Pink May meekly, "that Mr. Titmarsh himself has already written."

As she speaks, the March wind rushes in at the open window, and tosses to the ceiling the torn bits of paper.

"How did he get all the addresses?" I ask sternly.

"He wrote them down last night," she falters out, but I turn from her in contempt. Verily, our weapon in which we trusted has become a tool in the hands of the enemy.

"Jill—Anak—all of you," I say, "take your pens and write what I dictate. Are you ready?"

"It was a beautiful letter that he wrote," murmurs Pink May, "and speaking so nobly and well of all of you!"

"The Sieviking family present their compliments to their relations, and respectfully beg to inform them, that having been able in their prosperity to support existence without them, they have good hopes of also being able to do so in their adversity. Any invitation tendered by Mr. Titmarsh will not be recognized by the Sievikings, although he is at liberty to invite whoever he pleases to his own portion of the house.' That's all, now direct the envelopes, and stamps we will find, though we part with our front teeth to buy them."

"Dick," says Jill, "do you think this is wise? We elder ones can work, but how about Hetty, and the Squiffer, and Solomon? We must not throw away their chances blind-fold."

"Are they any more likely to do anything for us now than they have been these last few years?" I cry. "Have they ever concerned themselves about us, or known, or sought to know, whether we were hungry or miserable—living or dead? The only two good souls who really love us are far away."

"And don't I love you, Dick?" cries poor Pink May in tears.

"Yes, yes!" I say, somewhat softened, "but you are a silly little thing, aunt; it's no good crying about it, though. Try and have more sense in future."

"But—but," she says, "surely you will not send that to your sisters? And Mr. Titmarsh has of course written to *them*."

"No, I will write differently to them. They are careless and forgetful, but they can't help being great ladies, poor souls! If Hetty had got twenty-four silk gowns, and a mantle and bonnet to wear with each of them, I've no doubt they'd be very good sisters indeed to her—as sisters go."

"*I'll never* go and stop with either of them again unless I've got a new box and decent boots," cries Hetty, her cheeks an angry crimson; "it's bad enough to be poor, but it's awful to know people are *ashamed* of you!"

"Well, that sack you took with you last time *was* rather a twister," says Anak judicially, "and that wretched flunky *would* take the confounded thing round the neck—we should have done better to stick to the shawls and the brown paper."

"It must be trying to have one's own sister worse dressed than one's maid," says Jill, shaking her head; "we are delf, our married sisters are china. It's no good for us to attempt to swim down the stream together."

Hetty tosses her head. It is so pretty an one that I am inclined to think Jill is wrong, and that our youngest sister will some day hold up her head with the best of the pipkins, and ride the waves as boldly as any.

"They will all be furious at our sending them such a letter," says Jill, "but—they will come."

"Let them," I say indifferently, "though what they are coming for, I don't know. If *he* says we are ruined (and he ought to be the best judge of his own work), why we are, and talking won't mend it. The real point is, what are we going to do?"

"Work," says Anak, squaring his shoulders. "Why, I can carry a weight of—"

"In short, you can do a porter's work," I say, interrupting him, "while I can't do even that; Jill can make herself useful and darn socks; Hetty look pretty, and make bonnets; the Squiffer and Solomon satisfactorily perform all the functions of young animals. Behold the materials with which we are going to face the world, and beat it!"

"O! it is all very fine to talk about porters," says Anak, scowling; "there is the Natal Mounted Police that you get into by just *strength* and nothing else; you go early before the doors are open, and when they are thrown back, you fight your way in shoulder to shoulder, and those that get in first are appointed. And it is very good pay, ten pounds a month—of course I should send every penny home."

"Until you get potted by a Zulu, old fellow," I say, thinking how ill we could spare the brother whose somewhat rough exterior covers the tenderest heart, the gentlest spirit that ever had life breathed into it by God. "And then where should we be? Think of coming down from all the luxuries furnished by ten pounds a month, to nothing at all!"

"Mausolus, King of Caria," says Solomon instructively, "once filled his empty exchequer by compelling all his subjects to shave their heads, and then sold them wigs which they were ready to buy at any price to cover their shining polls with. If we all encouraged our hair to grow, we might earn an honest penny at least once a month by letting the barber crop us."

"That must be our last resource," says Anak, leaning back and passing his hands through his abundant locks; "it is to our pleasing appearances that we must look for such substantial advantages as rich husbands, and—and wives."

A shout of laughter follows this speech. "In short," I say dryly, "marriage is the only profession open to us, for it is the only one that can be entered without a preliminary apprenticeship, and without money."

"One good match would be the saving of us," says Anak gloomily, "if only some old boy, none of your hale young fellows of fifty and sixty, but a real *old 'un* would take a fancy to Hetty now. Why, my dear girl"—he throws his arm around her affectionately—"all you would have to do would be to *fix* him, marry him on the spot, polish him off, put on a widow's cap and—enjoy yourself!" Hetty, however, declines the honour, on the ground that she thinks it would be rather more fun *for us* than *for her*.

"Or who knows but some antediluvian old fossil mayn't take a fancy to aunt? I'm sure, after the encouragement given you by Mr. Titmarsh, aunt—" says Anak, turning round, then stops abruptly; he is addressing an empty chair.

Our great shout of laughter a minute ago must have blown her out of the door or the window. Probably the latter, as, on looking through it, we espy her at the end of the espalier walk, and by her side Mr. Titmarsh, who is gracefully indicating to her, as an object of natural curiosity, one of the clustered nosegays of the pear-tree.

"He's pumping her as to what we are going to do," cries Anak energetically; "I'll go and spoil sport by listening to every word he says—"

"Stay where you are," I say, "and see if you can manage to contribute an idea to the general good. One thing is very certain, we can't remain here, and there is only one place to which we can go—London."

"London!" cries Anak, all the ruddy colour dashed from his cheek, "where we shall never get a breath of pure air, never see a green leaf, or get a smell of the woods or earth—why, I'd fifty times rather stay and earn a shilling a day than go to live in *London*!"

"I daresay you would," I say dryly, "but that would be indulging yourself, not advancing your family in any way. Now let us look our position straight in the face and see what is best to be done. Here we are at the outset of life,

through no fault of our own—ruined. Now, are we going to waste our breath by crying over spilt milk, or shall we put forth our whole energies and strength to reverse the edict that Fate has apparently passed against us? Do we decide to remain lawless, idle vagabonds, living from hand to mouth, taking no thought for the morrow, or do we resolve to order our lives frugally, even painfully, with the one object steadfastly before our eyes of regaining Sieviking, to live in it decently, some day, as our forefathers did before us? Are we prepared to make every sacrifice to that one aim, to work, each one not for his individual good, but for the restoration of the family home and honour? I think this present adversity is just the touchstone that will determine our characters for good or evil, and that the real grit in us will come out, making us either proud or ashamed of one another."

I paused for a moment in my speech, but as they all crowd round me, I hold my hand up, for I have not yet done.

"Brothers—sisters—unless things turn out very differently to what I believe them to be, we have a hard, even a desperate, struggle before us. All the best years of our lives must go towards making good the loss inflicted by one bad man, and we *will* make it good, if Sieviking hands and hearts and spirits are worth anything. We shall want a purpose and a patience alike invincible, a dogged faith that no experience can break, a power of imagination that will enable us to see dreams when Hope herself fails us, a fortitude in the endurance of the hourly pin-pricks of poverty that approaches to heroism. All this we shall require—brothers—sisters, can you give it?"

"We can—we can!" they cry. But as I look from one to the other, I know that on two only can I rely—my trusty henchman, Anak, and my faithful friend and sister, Jill.

"It is possible that charity may be offered to us," I go on, "that a cold corner of a hearth, and some bitter unearned bread may be placed at the disposal of one or another of us,

and he who has a mind for such alms let him take them and be grateful, but never let him look to have lot or part in the restoration of the family glory, reared and builded through the burthen and heat of the day by the rest. Poor as we are and have been, we are yet independent ; we have made no complaints, asked no favours, nor accepted any, and in every way have shown ourselves fitter to bear the badge of poverty than that of servitude."

I pause for a moment to note the pride of regard, the air of liberty, worn alike by all our father's children, and cannot picture my young brothers and sisters as slaves to the will of selfish benefactors.

"Now shall we be the faggot of sticks, broken singly by the world, or, remaining entire, shall we defy and overcome it? We start heavily handicapped in the race, by extreme youth and ignorance, but if we resolve never to miss an opportunity likely to bring us an inch nearer our goal, and invariably to do a little more than our duty, we shall *win*."

"We will—we will!" they cry aloud, with tears of hope and sorrow splashing their cheeks, as April-like a shower as that now falling out yonder, and spangling with pearl the promise of the old pear-tree bough.

"And if we fail," I add in a lower key, "God being against us—we shall at least have done our best, have worn, not have rusted out our lives."

"And shall we be *very* old when we come home again to Sieviking, Dick?" says Hetty, whose lovely head has nestled down against my right shoulder, while Jill's practical one occupies the left.

"Very. You will be an old maid by that time, Hetty."

"And mayn't one ever have a sweetheart, Dick?"

"If he's of the right sort, and sees you in your poverty—not dressed up in borrowed plumes among your fine relations."

"And may Jill?" says Hetty, pouting.

"No ; Jill's my property. I can't part with her."

"How much shall we have to live on?" says Anak briskly, taking out pencil and paper. "I suppose there will be *something*."

"What we may get for the Court, I should say, and nothing else. If any one takes it, which is not likely, we might get a hundred a year—not a penny more."

"And we should have to *live* upon that!" cries Hetty in dismay; "feed, clothe, house, and educate ourselves upon one hundred pounds a year!"

"And precious lucky we may think ourselves if we get it," says Anak, nodding. "Remember the gentleman of Johnson's acquaintance who considered that 'thirty pounds a year was enough to enable a man to live without being contemptible.'"

"He allowed sixpence for dinner, and a penny for breakfast," says the Squiffer, taking up the parable, "and by spending a penny a day he might be for several hours in very good company, and do without supper. On clean shirt days he should go abroad *to pay visits*."

"We shan't be very welcome as visitors," says Hetty, resting her blooming face on her hands; "we shall become like the priest mentioned by Lorry, so thin and dry in all our articulations that our joints will crack loudly every time we move, and frighten people out of their wits. We can never afford sixpence a day for dinner, you know."

"We'll *make* some money," cries Anak with avidity; "we'll take the public by the nose, and compel it to fill our empty pockets, whether it will or no. We'll start a new pickle, or pill—there's a first-rate opening for a good sound family pill, advertised in some strikingly new and original manner. For instance, why should we not utilize our numbers by walking as sandwiches down Regent Street with 'Don't look at my back!' on one side, and a gigantic pill (we can call it the Sieviking Pill) on the other?"

"That's copyright," says Jill; "the other I mean, not the pill, and it's too late to think of picking Cockle up now."

"A mission for reforming gutter children is a fine thing," continues Anak, "or a good breach of promise case or two for the girls ; but no, I think it will be more to your advantage on the whole to be a *widow*, Hetty !"

After all, save Jill, they do not understand. There runs through my mind the verse, "When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I thought as a child ; but when I became a man, I put away childish things." I go to the window and look out, Anak following. Mr. Titmarsh and Pink May have just come into sight again ; they are bobbing and bowing to each other like two Mandarins. Some of the fun and frolic of the March wind has surely got into their old veins, and is making them as frisky as the lambs in the meadow out yonder.

"I shouldn't wonder," says Anak meditatively, "if we had some cornet-playing to-night ; indeed"—he sniffs up the air as though there were music, the best of its kind, in it—"Pink May's behaviour is so outrageously abominable that I feel perfectly certain we *shall* hear the cornet played to-night."

CHAPTER XI.

"Their beds are made in the heavens high,
Down at the foot of our good Lord's knee,
Weel set about wi' gilly flowers ;
I wot sweet company for to see."

I DON'T know why the espalier walk should elect to rush out into a superb arcade of rose and white in a single night, but surely where yesterday we saw but close-folded pinkish buds, this morning we discover a million striped and tufted shells spread to the sun, no two alike, but nipped, freaked, and patched with colour as the fruit itself will be by-and-by. Mr. Pitt, his hands behind him, buzzes from one blossom to another like a bumble bee just born, who has dreamt of honey, but never yet tasted it.

Happy man ! Having decently, and in order, arranged a

winding-sheet about our family affairs, and with much legal circumlocution informed us that we are beggars, he is able to step out into the sunshine and merge our clouded lives completely in—apple-blossoms.

A distant rumble of wheels, a clattering of steps, a double knock that severely tries the capacities of our ancient knocker, then silence, for we are too far off to hear footsteps.

"Arrival number one," I say, selecting a letter from a pile that lies before me; "Aunt Theodosia. To be sure, bankruptcy has its social advantages—she never drove twenty miles to see us before, and probably never will again."

"She hasn't come to see *us*," says Anak, "but the satin furniture. What did she say about it?"

"H'm—h'm," I say, glancing it over; "she has received our insolent letter, and a charming one from that delightful, ill-used man, Mr. Titmarsh. She is not surprised to hear we are ruined. What could be expected when people had ten children when they could not afford more than three? She supposes the suite of Esterhazy-brown satin having been so long in use would be sold cheap, especially to a relative, and she thinks she could get one of the younger boys into the Bluecoat School."

"Anything else?" cries Anak, snapping his fingers violently. "And as to the furniture, why the Chancellor shall have it first, or I'm a Dutchman."

"Uncle Tobias won't come," says Hetty, who has a spray of apple-blossom at her white neck; "he says that the last time he was here, one of us pulled a chair from under him, and that his spinal cord has never been right since."

"Which little piece of amusement cost us exactly thirty thousand pounds," I say dryly. "While for the luxury of hitching off Uncle Golightly's wig with the fishing-tackle, we have paid at least another ten."

"There *is* Uncle Golightly!" says Anak, as a pompous knock rumbles down the passage. "Mr. Titmarsh will have all his work cut out to bamboozle *him*."

"Nothing of the 'sort," I say; "he will set him and John James by the ears, and get a rise out of both. If he's proved himself too much for Mr. Pitt, he will be more than a match for all the rest."

"Talk of an angel," says Hetty, as a brisk, jubilant rat-tat makes itself heard, "here we are! We shall enter on tiptoe, and smiling. We shall make a joke that will set everybody's teeth on edge, and then we shall sit down hastily, either on our own, or somebody else's hat."

"Where's Pink May?" I inquire, looking round. "She never means to face Aunt Theodosia surely!"

"Doesn't she though!" says Hetty, nodding. "She's got on a pink Dolly Varden cap, and all her rings and *châtelaines*, and a tail twice as long as herself, and off she has gone to the dining-room to look after the dear boys' and girls' interest, she says."

"I would give something to see the passage-at-arms between them."

"There, they have all arrived now; Marshall is fetching Mr. Pitt."

The old man goes into the house at last, looking back often at his apple-blossoms.

"What humbugs relations are!" I say with disgust; "they always advise but they never *do* anything. There is an ossification of the heart peculiar to relatives alone when money affairs are mentioned—above all temples where they congregate should be inscribed, 'All peace abandon ye who mention—money.' You are welcome to their homes, their hearths, all, so long as you don't want anything; but when you menace their pockets, they simply shrivel up."

"A quarter of an hour for lies and flattery," says Anak, looking at the clock, "five minutes for Madeira, another five for Mr. Pitt's statement, and we shall be sent for."

"And do you mean to go, Dick?" says Jill timidly.

"Yes."

"But," cries Hetty in dismay, "I thought you did not mean to go into the room—we are worse than usual to-day. What *will* Aunt Theodosia say?"

"Your frock *is* short, certainly," says Anak judicially, "but your ankles are good, and it's never indecent to show your ankles unless they are bad ones. And you needn't stand up-right, you know; you can stoop a bit."

A discreet knock at the door—enter Marshall.

"Mr. Titmarsh's love, and will all you young ladies and gentlemen step into the dining-room directly?"

"Keep the love for yourself, and we'll come when we're ready," says Anak fiercely.

"Come along, Jill," I say, and with her half-mended sock on her arm, she puts her hand in mine, and we set out together.

Marshall flings wide the dining-room door, but we advance such a very short way inside, that it is shut with some difficulty upon the *queue* formed by the younger ones.

"Here are our young people," says Mr. Titmarsh, advancing affectionately towards us; "come in, my dear children!" And he lays his hand on Jill's stockinged arm to lead her towards the relatives who sit in a semi-circle round the window.

Jill shakes off his hand as though it were a caterpillar, and does not stir a step.

"You sent for us," I say, addressing the semi-circle, "and we are here."

For three seconds Aunt Theodosia surveys us through her eye-glass in petrified silence, a space of time appropriated by the irrepressible John James to a glance of delighted admiration at Hetty, and the exclamation of "Gad! what a fine girl!" while Hetty, drawing herself up to give him a glance of withering scorn, suddenly recollects her legs and doubles up again.

"Are these my *nieces*, my *nephews*, that I behold before me?" says Aunt Theodosia, in a sepulchral voice.

"Bless my soul! things have come to a pretty pass indeed," says Uncle Golightly, staring at us.

"We are very poor here," says Mr. Titmarsh, looking down sadly at his own threadbare coat and continuations (can he have hired them for the occasion from the Chancellor?). "The utmost that we can do is to try and be *neat*—"

"I don't see any very strenuous attempts towards tidiness among these young people," says Aunt Theodosia, glancing severely from Mr. Titmarsh's shabby neatness to our unabashed raggedness. "I always hated finery (she transfixes with her eye-glass Pink May's gewgaws), and I never could endure coloured ribbons (another raking stare); a *figure chiffonnée* has ever been my abhorrence—but the poorest person can be neat, and should be."

"It is a duty to oneself and society," says Colonel Golightly, whose eye-glass has come to a full stop opposite poor Hetty.

"Tidy people are usually respectable," says Lady Theodosia, "and my sister-in-law"—she glances towards the panel upon which mother hangs with waist

"Jimp as a willow wand,"

and a cap with gauze strings that modestly strive to hide her bust—"was not a tidy person."

"Consequently her descendants are not respectable," puts in John James, as if to himself.

"And *les convenances*," continues Aunt Theodosia calmly, "were never sufficiently regarded here. I have made it my rule through life to observe the decencies of society. Manners maketh man and woman. The late Sir Peter was in many respects peculiar, and frequently he would sit at table with me for days together without speaking a word; but if he forgot his manners, I did not mine, but used to say to him, 'Can I send you a little more gravy, Sir Peter?' or, 'Do you take stuffing?' and the consequence is that appearances were always kept up—my name has never come before the world save as a respected wife, while my comforts have been always assured to me."

"Let us live and die respectable," murmurs John James, ecstatically.

"Now my sister-in-law," says our Aunt Theodosia, turning a withering glance on the irrepressible Tommy, "not being neat herself, did not inculcate neatness in her children. And I always hold that the mind is a distinct reflection of the body, thus the deplorable slatternliness visible among these young people to-day indicates to me a moral confusion that augurs but ill for their future."

"When you have quite finished your homily on neatness, ma'am," I say patiently, "we shall be glad to know what your business is with us, for I believe it was you who sent for us here?"

"What!" cries Aunt Theodosia, sitting erect, "am I to have the words taken out of my mouth—to be dictated to by this jackanapes? Are you aware, sir, that but for your Uncle Golightly and myself you would absolutely be compelled to *starve*? And this is gratitude!"

"When anything substantial is offered to us," I say calmly "I hope we shall know how to receive it. Meantime, we are obliged by your proposal about the Bluecoat School, and regret that none of us are able to accept it."

"Quite impossible!" says Pink May, shaking her curls. "You would be certain to catch a cold walking about without any hat, you know!"

"Beggars cannot afford colds," says Uncle Golightly severely; "but I suppose they are looking to their married sisters to provide for them."

"I'm much mistaken if their hopes are not disappointed in *that* quarter. Two more extravagant, heedless young women I never knew; they'll ruin their husbands' estates before they're done. I see accounts of their receptions in the *Morning Post*, and every imaginable folly—why are they not here to-day?" says Aunt Theodosia.

None of us deign to reply; but Pink May, who is not proud, throws her little bedecked form into the breach.

"There is a drawing-room to-day," she says, nodding. "Bell wears gold brocade and pearls; Cynthia white velvet, Mechlin lace and diamonds. I am inclined to think it rather too heavy for her style of beauty, and Hetty thinks so too."

"And pray were any offers of *assistance* made?" says Aunt Theodosia with a snort of disgust.

"Of course. Hetty and Jill were to go and stay with them as long as ever they liked, and to be sure and take several ball and dinner dresses, as they would probably go out a great deal this spring."

"What inconsiderate selfishness!—what folly!" cries Aunt Theodosia uplifting her hands; "and the girls have *accepted* the invitations?"

"No, ma'am," I say calmly; "we are none of us fine enough for paying visits just now."

"Though I could easily have lent them some of my dresses," says Pink May, spreading out her peacock tail, "and with a little alteration—"

"They would do to go to court in," says Aunt Theodosia, crushingly.

"Miss Sieviking is our guest, ma'am," I say, quietly, "and you will have the goodness, while you are in our house, to treat her with respect."

"Poor little popinjay—it *is* a shame!" mutters John James, *sotto voce*.

"A glass of Madeira, my *dear* Lady Theodosia?" says Mr. Titmarsh, anxiously. "Don't allow these young people to upset you; it is merely their unfortunate manner; they mean well."

"I hope I know my duty," says Aunt Theodosia, cleverly combining a scathing look at me with one of gratitude to Mr. Titmarsh, "and no amount of insolence and ingratitude shall prevent my doing it. Such selfishness as that displayed by my married nieces must arouse indignation in every noble mind. A visit! Pshaw! the offer only merits contempt; but one of

something handsome and permanent now—an offer that would provide for one of these poor creatures, what would you say to that, brother Golightly?”

“I should say it was handsome, very handsome indeed of you, sister,” says Uncle Golightly, and Mr. Titmarsh murmurs just audibly, “Noble, indeed!”

“What is the use of relatives unless they can help one another in time of trouble?” says Aunt Theodosia, largely and generously, her plum-coloured bonnet-strings thrown back, her very mantle exhaling benignity and almsgiving. “For my part, I am willing to take charge of my niece Geraldine, to feed, clothe, and house her—for nothing.”

“Noble—most noble!” murmurs Mr. Titmarsh.

“Very handsome indeed,” assents Uncle Golightly.

“You can mend?” says Aunt Theodosia sharply to Jill.

“Yes.”

“And sew and cut out and make dresses?”

“Not very well.”

“Ah!” dissatisfiedly; “that’s a pity. My dressmaker’s bills are dreadful—but you can be taught. You are an early riser?”

“Yes.”

“And can dust china, without breaking it?”

“I suppose so.”

Jill looks suddenly up at me. I answer her with a smile.

“*Apropos* of China,” says Aunt Theodosia, with an abrupt change of tone, “I think I will buy in the Dresden dinner service before the sale; having been in use so many years, of course it would go cheap.”

“There’s not much of it left,” says Jill, honestly.

“What!” cries the lady, “it is all broken up—you have actually *used* it?”

“Our common service was all broken, and we had no money to buy new—so we have been using the Dresden these two years.”

"Goths! Vandals!" screams Aunt Theodosia; "and the silver plate—is *that* gone too?"

"Kit and Will sold it for what it would fetch when they went abroad. They asked Mr. Titmarsh for some of their money, but he would not give them any, so we gave them leave to take it."

"*You* gave them leave!" screams Aunt Theodosia. "O! the idiots! the owls! the apes! Worth a thousand pounds if it was worth a penny! and here you are wanting bread, and I suppose eating out of—"

"Pewter," says Anak.

"And all squandered in drink," says Uncle Golightly, "if half the tales I hear of those young men are true."

"I don't believe everything I hear, sir," I say calmly; "for instance, we have heard droll stories about yourself, when you were young, but they may be false."

"Of how your man-servant hunted everywhere for your breeches one morning before you were up, and couldn't find them anywhere, because you had *got them on!*" says Anak, severely; and how you insisted on sitting through the window one night, because you were positive it was a *chair!*"

"I really must interfere," says Mr. Titmarsh, emphatically: "I will *not* stand by to see Colonel Golightly so wantonly insulted."

"Then you can leave the room," I say quietly.

"And is the Esterhazy satin furniture gone *too?*" cuts in Aunt Theodosia, angrily, her face as deeply plum-coloured as her strings.

"I believe not," I say indifferently; "but it will be sold with the rest of the effects. There will be no buying-in beforehand by anybody."

"And this is gratitude!" says Aunt Theodosia, hysterically. Then, recovering herself, "So you know you *are* ruined, and to what extent?"

"Surely he who has wrought our ruin should be accurately aware of its scope. He informed our aunt that it was complete, and last night Mr. Pitt corroborated his statement."

I advance to the table, and stand beside the elderly man who has hitherto appeared so immersed in his papers as to be totally unaware of our presence.

"Sir," I say—and at the sound of my voice he looks up—"are you afraid to say before these persons what you said to me in confidence last night? Can, and will you for once drop the cold, cautious lawyer in the honest truth-speaking man who hates theft and oppression, and will speak his mind as if no such thing as a law for libel existed? If so, tell us your plain opinion of that swindler before you."

For a moment it seems as though I had flashed some of my own righteous scorn and anger into him. His eye kindles, a faint colour touches his cheek, fiery words seem to tremble on his lips, then his face chills as it were, and when he speaks it is as the business automaton, not the man.

"There is not a tittle of proof against Mr. Titmarsh," he says; "not one tittle."

"So you told me last night," I say sternly, "but that you were as morally certain of his guilt as I am. Do you deny it? Drop the lawyer for one moment if you can, and speak as man to man—do you deny it?"

"You are a very vehement young man," says Mr. Pitt, rubbing his glasses, "very vehement indeed, for a young man who has his way to make in the world."

"You do *not* deny it," I say, "and that is sufficient. If we don't prosecute and convict him as a felon, it is because we have no money—and no friends."

"So far as I can see," says Uncle Golightly, "Mr. Titmarsh has done his duty by you—and a very thankless duty it seems to have been—in the strictest sense of the word. It appears that when he came here he found you on the brink of ruin (the style of living was always most extravagant), and

so far from helping himself to your inheritance, he has spent the whole of his small fortune, five thousand pounds in all, I believe, in trying to retrieve your position."

"A mere trifle—do not mention it," murmurs Mr. Titmarsh, whose expression is that of some resigned suffering saint only kept upright by the thought of the crown that will be his by-and-by.

"He has kept account of the paltry sums he put in," I say; "but is there any of those he took out?"

"I leave the Court poorer than I entered it," says Mr. Titmarsh, with great dignity, and addressing our relatives, "but I do not complain—neither would I leave it now were I of any further use in it; but being unable to avert the ruin that has long been gathering, and having no money left of my own, I have accepted a humble post abroad, and sail almost immediately. Some day, perhaps, these young people, now so hard on me, will judge me differently."

He appears to break down, and turns abruptly aside to the window.

"My dear Mr. Titmarsh!" says Aunt Theodosia, rising and rustling after him, whereat Pink May, as I live, becomes scarlet, fidgets, then ambles after him too, appearing at his other side. We see him cast an impartially tender look on each, as he takes from his pocket-book a piece of paper and hands it to Aunt Theodosia.

"As steerage passenger," we hear him murmur, as he puts it back again, and then our aunts come slowly back, with actually tears in the eyes of each.

"Bunkum," said John James, unexpectedly and aloud.

"Sir!" says Colonel Golightly, for the first time appearing to perceive the existence of the individual whom his sister stooped to wed, dying of the condescension before the year was out.

"*Bunkum*," repeats John James, bounding from his chair, and snapping his fingers thrice in Mr. Titmarsh's astonished countenance; "*that's* for your mission and your steerage

passage, and all the rest of it! You're sneaking out of England to enjoy the money you've filched from these children, and pretty lucky you may think yourself that you ain't being sent at Her Majesty's expense. Ugh! it makes me feel sick!"

And he reseats himself, violently, looking as if a black draught were being held under his nose.

"Bravo!" cries Anak, with a great clap, that sends Mr. Titmarsh shuddering backwards. "Well done, *Uncle John James*," and he seizes him by the hand and shakes it heartily.

"Silk cloaks with cotton linings, my boy," says John James, indicating Lady Theodosia and Colonel Golightly elegantly with his thumb, "colour, *green*."

"Insufferable!" says Colonel Golightly, prancing up and down with rage; but the lady, with an excellent assumption of not even being aware that John James is present, consults her watch.

"It grows late," she says, "and we have actually as yet only settled the future of one of these poor creatures. Jill we may consider provided for, and Hetty I should think will be able to make up her time very well between the houses of her two sisters, especially if they are liberal to her in the way of cast-off clothes."

"And boots," murmurs John James.

"Uncle Golightly's influence will, no doubt, obtain posts for the two elder boys in the bank—the younger ones can, by the exertion of influence in the right quarter, be got into schools—so *that's* all settled. When will you be ready to come to me?" she adds, peremptorily addressing Jill.

I feel a little tug at my hand, I grip hers fast, and look Aunt Theodosia full in the face.

"Never," I say.

Aunt Theodosia bounds on her seat.

"You mean to say that you refuse my offer?" she screams; "absolutely *refuse* it?"

"Speak for yourself, Jill," I say. "Will you go with her?"

to dust her china, make her velvet gowns, mend the house linen, differing in no degree from her other female lackeys, save that you receive no wage?"

"I will stay with you, Dick," she says, clinging to me, and looking up in my face.

"And starve," says Aunt Theodosia, venomously. "What! are all my plans to be upset by an insolent young malapert in a jacket?"

"It had tails once," murmurs John James, gently.

"If one might venture to inquire them," she cries, swelling with passion, "what are your plans?"

I disdain to reply to her, but Anak, with unwise courage, rushes precipitately to the front.

"We mean to stick together," he says, all the colour in his bright face, "to work, to struggle on—if needs be, to *starve* together—but some day or other to win the right to come back to Sieviking and live in it again, as our fathers did before us."

"I think," says Aunt Theodosia, angrily, "that before making all your arrangements, it would be as well to consult the principals in the matter, and, as I said to Mr. Pitt just now, neither your Uncle Golightly nor myself see our way to spending a large sum of money in—"

"Keep your money, ma'am," says Anak, curtly; "we never asked for it, and don't want it. We mean *ourselves* to win the right to live again in Sieviking; we shouldn't value it a bit if we were beholden to charity for it."

"O! excellent! very good!" says Aunt Theodosia, holding her handkerchief before her mouth, and affecting to smile. "I don't think these young people *quite* understand their position, Mr. Pitt, or that unless Colonel Golightly or I purchase Sieviking, they have not the remotest chance of ever setting foot in it again save as strangers?"

"It is not true," I cry, trembling in every limb; "Sieviking, our own Sieviking, to be *sold*? It can't be true—say it is not true," I cry, seizing Mr. Pitt's arm and shaking it violently.

"Say that we are ruined, homeless, weighed down by debt, but do not say that Sieviking is lost to us!"

He answers me not a word, but I think there are tears in his eyes as he looks up at me; there are none in mine as I turn and face the miserable cur who sulks behind our aunt's petticoats, trying to stand erect, to smile.

"And this is your doing—yours," I say, through my teeth. "O! God, that such as you should have power to tear up and cast out the family that has grown, and thriven, and rooted itself in the soil four hundred years and more! That to maintain your worthless body in luxury, our lives should not only be ruined, but that the sole hope that would have brightened them should be wrested from us, leaving us no heart to work, no future to look to, the old home gone, the family broken up and scattered through the world. . . ."

"Dick! Dick!" cries Jill, clinging to me in terror, "don't look like that, don't—perhaps some one in the family will buy it. . . ."

I put her back, her face is dim to me, an awful sensation of loss, of hurt overwhelms me; I feel as though part of me had been cut away, leaving me for the moment possessed of but a maimed consciousness—the arrow of the enemy has verily found me out, and pierced me to the very core of my heart, Sieviking.

"Sir," I say, turning to Mr. Pitt, "when you told me last night that we were ruined, why did you not tell me this also—why have you told me half, not the whole of the truth?"

"I knew what a terrible blow it would be to you," he says, "and I thought the shock would be greatly broken if I were able to tell you this morning that it would remain in the family, and might possibly be rented or repurchased by you at some future date. But neither Lady Theodosia nor Colonel Golightly care to become purchasers—so the property will have to be put up to public auction."

"Is this absolutely necessary?"

"The creditors will not wait. The only wonder is that you have been allowed to remain here so long. Mr. Titmarsh" (he permits himself the luxury of a tone of sarcasm) "has certainly shown great adroitness in staving off the crash so long."

"Aunt," I say, marching up to Pink May, "*you* love us, or used to—we're not too proud to ask a favour of *you*—won't you buy the old place and keep it for us till we've earned enough to buy it back again of you!"

"I only wish I could, dear Dick!" says Pink May, the tears running down her cheeks, "but you see, I am so very poor; we have only just two hundred a year for us all to live upon, and if I get rid of that, where will the poor girls be, and what is to become of us all?"

For a moment I look at her, not understanding; then in the midst of the hollow selfishness of the rest, the goodness of this simple soul touches me so to the heart, that I put my arms around her little frail body, and kiss her with a feeling of almost reverence.

"I'm dashed," says John James, jumping up, "if I wouldn't buy it myself if I'd got the money—but I haven't, and that's the long and short of it."

Colonel Golightly and Lady Theodosia cast upon him a glance of superb contempt. To be vulgar with means is bad, but to be vulgar without is to be a species of mental cherubim who, with all the desire to sit down, lacks the wherewithal to accomplish that feat.

"But I thought you were going to marry *him*?" says Anak, suspiciously, as he gives her a hug that sets all her little gew-gaws topsyturvy.

"Dear Anak!" she says, trying to set her cap straight. "Mother to my own sister's children—who ever thought of such a thing?"

"I should hope not, at your time of life," says Aunt Theodosia with a violent sniff (surely a washerwoman must have been one of our direct ancestresses), "though a person who

would be guilty of that cap," she adds in a lower key, "would be guilty of anything."

"It is a beautiful cap!" cries Anak fiercely, "and she looks beautiful in it; and if I have to sweep a crossing for it, ma'am, she shall *always* have a ribbon of just that colour to wear."

"This dear lady," says Mr. Titmarsh advancing, and, as he advances, Anak retreats, "has shown so much sympathy with me under my troubles as to make me her firm friend, but we have no thoughts of marriage." (Pink May's face falls,—every woman would like the credit of refusing an offer of marriage when she has not the reality.) "I may have some hopes," he gives a wonderful look at Aunt Theodosia, who turns a deeper plum-colour, and looks down (simultaneously pressing Pink May's hand, who simpers and looks at her brass shoe buckle), "but I will not speak of these now. Permit me to remark that, subject to such restrictions as Lady Theodosia sees fits to impose, I think the idea an excellent one that Miss Sieviking should reside with the young people in my absence."

And he retires to the background, having by one stroke convinced both women (one of whom he has never seen but twice in his life—but let that pass—*Paudace, Paudace, toujours Paudace*, should surely be man's motto with woman), that he is in love with each.

"And so no one will buy Sieviking," I say, looking out through the open window, the thought idly passing through my mind that there will be a splendid crop of apples this year. "I don't suppose it has any great beauty save its woods to recommend it to other people, but the soil is fertile, and there is good hunting in the neighbourhood."

"Why don't Lady Hungerford or Mrs. Longleat buy it?" says Aunt Theodosia, "they have plenty of money for their follies; let them do something useful with it, as you seem so set on retaining Sieviking."

"Our sisters, ma'am," I say, "received no fortunes; and it is right that such money as their husbands please to give them

should be spent on the appanage that fits their position. To ask either to purchase Sieviking would be unjust."

I lift my head, and look from one to the other of the two shallow selfish faces before me, and there stirs in me something of that feeling so magnificently described by Plato as "a rising up of a part of the soul against the whole soul," and I feel that one word of appeal, of prayer to the two before me, would choke me in the uttering.

"Come away, Jill," I say, taking her hand in mine; and so we go silently away, with nothing in the wide world now that we may call our own, but one another.

CHAPTER XII.

"But this is human life
The disappointment, the anxiety,
Imagination's struggles far and nigh,
All human."

IN Sieviking woods the stir, the flutter, the frolic of spring is at its height. As the April breeze ruffles the tree tops, a pale shimmer of green seems to pass like a breath over their surface, delicate as hope, vivid as imagination, exquisite surely as the foretaste of that happiness which mortals dream of, but never grasp. As yet all is vague, indefinite, no more than a tender breadth of colour, but soon will be spread before us the work with which Dame Nature night and day has been busy aloft.

With her cunning fingers she is crimping, nicking, fluting, and crannyng the young leaves at their birth, so that by-and-by, when their green flags wave royally in the breeze, there shall be no two alike, or of precisely the same colour and size.

It is only when she comes to her least successful work that she sinks into dull uniformity of design, and reproduces her worst impressions indefinitely. Everywhere is seething,

nascent life, that each moment precipitates itself blindly a step further on the path of knowledge; and to the initiated ear the air is full of curious, subtle sounds as the young life of the forest struggles out of bondage and darkness into light. Some one has said that if our ears were able to catch the murmur of the currents whirling in the millions of cells that make up every tree, we should be stunned as with the roar of a great city. And if a man do not feel his heart (howsoever heavy) stir in him with the young buds, then he is not God's creature, fashioned out of dust, even as they, but something in which the soul, the very breath of life, is wanting.

The very wind is brisk and full of business to-day, with no more than time to look into a blue eye here, or touch an opening lip of sweetness there, his business being to beat up the loiterers, to hurry the timid, so that when the roll-call of the flowers and leaves shall be called, not one shall be found missing. To break asunder the brown buds within which the pointlets of the oak-leaves lurk, to coax the crimped fans of the beech-leaves out of their fawn-coloured sheaths, to jog the memory of the silver fir, and to bid the poplar shake out her rustling skirts of silk; these are his tasks.

All of which preparations I note, to all of which whispers I give heed, looking and marking stubbornly, as one who draws his death wound together with both hands, and cries aloud that he cannot be hurt, for that he feels no pain. To-morrow, and to-morrow I will suffer, but this April day is mine, and these woods are mine, and on the swelling uplands, the broad meadows of our inheritance, I will look once more with the pride and love that have grown with my life, strengthened with my strength, and will cease but with my breath.

A shadow crosses the sun, and on my cheeks there fall the first drops of one of those petulant April showers, that borrow the sound and fury, while possessing none of the force, of a real storm.

The topmost boughs of the trees swaying beneath it, show

their rufflings of green upon the dull brown surface, the starlings' nests sway in the upper trunk holes of the hollow giant beneath which I sit; for a moment, I almost fancy that I shall hear the rain sweeping up with a roar through the forest, in one of the great storms that now and again beat around Sieviking.

I lift my brow to the passionate stinging rain-drops, and their touch seems good to me. For I know that there will come a time when I shall long for the feel of a spring shower, for the smell of the woods and fields; when in the narrow haunts and crowded ways of men I shall look back to these days of poverty and freedom, and deem that in them I might have reckoned myself happy.

How shall I hear the tread of the seasons go by in the dark, stifled city life? They who dwell there say in March, "there will be violets in the hedges now," and in May, "the cowslips will be shaking their golden bells," but to us who know, Nature's moods are defined by no sharp and sudden line, she merges her seasons one into the other as she wills, and we reckon not by this month, or that, but when the sloe flower whitens the hedge say, "we must get our barley ready for sowing," as when the eel is known to be stealthily leaving his winter quarters the alder boughs will be bursting into blossom.

I wonder why it is to our first home, to no later one, no matter how happy we may be in it, that we cling with such passionate love and admiration? Is it that in our extreme youth we have intenser powers of loving, or that, with the fierce faithfulness of all untried souls, we rebel against any notion of change as ingratitude?

No matter how hotly may burn in a youth the spirit of adventure, he seldom leaves his father's home without the hope of returning to it. If he can do so without one pang, neither expecting nor desiring to see it again, if he cannot point out one spot and say "There I have dreamed; yonder I have

suffered and enjoyed," then he is without imagination, and the golden stores of memory are as sealed books to him.

I came hither this morning at daybreak, and sitting beneath this very tree, I watched the cold dawn spread in the grey skies.

There was scarcely a tint of rose in the heavens, the flowers were wan and pale, and poor Adonis (the anemone) seemed to wish himself warm below the earth with Proserpine, instead of above it with her rival.

All seemed cold and lifeless ; but I was not cold, for hope was warm within my breast, and I felt as he who knows the work that is set to his right hand, and feels within him the will and the power to do it.

I saw stretching out before us the long years of toil, of self-denial, of sacrifice ; and I said to myself that almost every great man that ever lived had looked ahead in his youth as I was doing, and resolved, as I was resolving, to conquer. That most great fortunes had been made by men who began as penniless lads like me, and I thought they must have done it by determining, no matter how humble might be their first avocation, by always doing a little more than their duty.

And, at the end of the long vista, Sieviking and honour seemed to smile at me, and as my thoughts brightened, so did the morning ; opal lights flushed the heavens, the flowers ceased to tremble, the shimmering green of the young year caught the sunlight ; the morning had stretched herself, smiled, and was awake. I rose, at length, and made my way homewards, with a secret exultation at my heart, no longer the child, the passive disciple of Nature, but the youth whose eager eyes looked out hopefully on the battle of life, into which he was about to plunge.

That was at daybreak, this is but noon ; yet in the interim I have leaped at one bound from youth to manhood, I have left for ever the illusions of youth behind me, and attained to the bitterness and infidelity of manhood. I no longer hope,

I *will*; I do not dislike, I *hate*; I look human nature in the face, and, finding it vile, cast it under foot, and cry aloud that it is not God's work; with the defiance of the rebel, not the courage of the hero, I buckle on my shield, and resolve to conquer, not for honour's sake, but that I may hurl back, in the teeth of those who have scorned us, a contempt equal to their own.

I laugh aloud, and the echo of my laughter comes back to me through the forest, harsh and ugly. I am thinking how curious it is that we should ever permit ourselves to be most deeply moved by those whom we most profoundly despise; that they should have power to bring out the worst traits in our nature, while those we love and value, at best do but doubtfully encourage the good that is in us.

Revenge, hatred, lust of gold for power's sake, this morning found no place in my breast; honest ambition and the desire to regain Sieviking alone fired me; but now it seems to me that less than the joy of dwelling again in the old house would be the fierce joy of showing our contemptible relatives that we could win back our inheritance without them.

He has strayed far from the path of greatness who desires success but to humiliate those whom he despises. Stung by a sudden self-contempt, I lift my eyes to find that the storm has almost spent itself, that the skies are blue as the beaten down periwinkles, flowers of death, at my feet, while in the distance, bathed in tears and sunshine, Sieviking emerges radiant out of the mist of rain.

This is the last day of April. How many years will it be before I again see its dear familiar face smiling at me through an April veil of laughter, and of weeping? Ah, me! ah, me! when at length I shall have won back our inheritance, and stand beneath these trees with the weight of years upon my brow, will it then be to me all my heart's desire—will it suffice to fill my life—shall I be content to sit down beneath their shade and rest—happy?

"We *must* win it back—we *will*," I exclaim, lifting my eyes defiantly; and as I speak, lo! the great bow of God in the heavens—beautiful, terrible, sublime—the one eternal oath that never has been broken; and as I gaze at it, abashed, the words dying as boastings upon my lips, I see how, in its span of glory, that radiant arc seems to encircle, and hold in its shelter, the distant roof-tree of Sieviking.

CHAPTER XIII.

"God made him, therefore let him pass for a man. In truth I know it is a sin to be a mocker."

"Dick! Dick!" calls Jill's voice through the wood, and I rouse myself with a start to find that the sun has gone down, that a chill wind is wailing through the trees, and that I am wet, cold, and hungry.

"I have been looking for you everywhere," says Jill, as she sits down beside me, and looks anxiously into my face, "in the tallet, the pigsty, everywhere but here."

"It is cold," I say, standing up; "let's go in. It's about the last time you'll look for and find me *here*, old girl."

"But we shall not have to go *at once*," cries Jill; "we may be here months longer if nobody buys it."

"How could we enjoy it if we knew that at any moment a stranger would have a right to call it his own? No, no; I have said Good-bye to Sieviking, Jill."

"Then, are we going soon, Dick?"

"Yes, we have idled long enough; now we are going to work. Have all those people gone?"

"All but John James; he is in the schoolroom. He is a good little fellow, Dick!"

"Yes. And what is Mr. Titmarsh about?"

"I fancy Marshall is packing, and that *he* means to go away in a day or two."

"Or sooner," I say, with a grim smile that Jill does not see.

"Where's Pink May?"

"She saw him kiss Aunt Theodosia's hand at parting," says Jill, fencing off a night-jar that comes whirling against her in its phantom-like flight, "and she was very angry. I think she is upstairs putting on another cap."

The ruddy fire-light shines through the schoolroom window as we go by, and in the midst of the circle round it I espy the chubby features of John James.

"Here you are at last," cries Hetty, pulling me towards the fire; and as I sit down blinking like an owl she tries to warm my hands between her own, fussing over and fidgetting me as women (God bless them!) always will and do those they love.

"You must be starved," says Jill, taking the bread and cheese out of the oak settle, while Anak retires to a distant cupboard to draw a jug of cider.

"I have some work to do to-night," I say briefly; "I will eat after. What have you all been talking about?"

"You," says John James, smartly, "and it's all settled. You're to be what you want to be; you can begin to-morrow, if you like."

"Impossible," I say, colouring hotly; "there is no money for it; every penny that we can save must go to buy back Sieviking, for that we shall buy it back," I add, doggedly (the rainbow's hues being still around me), "I am certain."

"H'm," says John James, doubtfully.

"It's all settled," says Solomon, nodding his little wise head, "and you're going to have your fees paid at a hospital, and will see bodies—*dead* bodies—just as often as now you see live ones."

"While at home you will have at least four people upon whom you can practise as subjects," says the Squiffer.

"And when you are *getting on*," says Anak, "we shall be able to utilise our numbers by acting as your domestic servants; we should form a complete staff, and people would think you were making a fortune."

"Which is the next step to making one," says Hetty; "but, O! Dick, it would be an awful thing to go through life labelled—Sawbones."

"Don't be afraid," I say, dryly; "probably I shall never be anything higher than a chemist's boy. What made you all talk such stuff?"

"It's earnest," says John James, solemnly. "Look here, Dick. I'm a poor man; but when your aunt stooped to marry me, and died, it wasn't poverty killed her, nor yet regret (as her fine relatives said, though she knew 'em well enough for the windbags they were), but the little young life that took hers, and then *that* went too, and I've been a lonely man ever since, and I like you, Dick. I can't buy Sieviking, nor yet offer you something handsome to live upon; but if you'll let me pay your expenses for the profession you fancy, till you feel your feet in it, why I'll be as proud to do it as if you were the boy that might have lived to grow up, but didn't. No thanks, now, for I feel it an honour to serve a good plucked 'un like you."

I stretch my hand across to him in silence. Hitherto we have despised this man, for we are as proud as we are poor; at this moment I have contempt for myself only.

"Thank you," I say, simply, and then our hands fall asunder, but not our hearts. John James and I are friends henceforth to our lives' end.

"Yes," says Jill, "you are to become famous, and rebuild the family home and honour, and the rest of us are to sit down under the shadow of your greatness, for ever. It will be a grand day when we come back home for good, won't it, Dick?" she adds, with an abrupt change of tone, her eyes wandering round the dear old room with all the love in them of a last leave-taking.

My eyes follow hers. There is the old round table at which we have sat and groaned at our lessons, and chaffed over our frugal meals; there, too, the corner that each of our noses had fitted in turn (why does such a peculiar ignominy attach itself

to being stood in a corner? And why does every nose, of whatsoever shape, fit any corner accurately?). There, too, the old spinet, which one may sit upon without evolving a groan from its inner consciousness; and a hard ache comes into my eyes as I look, for I know that we shall never see them again as we see them now. When we come back to them grown men and women they will have grown strange to us, perhaps have become poor and paltry in our eyes, as do most things at maturity that have been precious and beautiful to us in youth. Bring me back the same face! cried the mother to her boy when he left her to learn the world. Juster to have cried, Bring me back the same heart! for the face may not soon alter, but the heart must. Happy he who goes through life with the illusions of youth still on him, and is esteemed a fool of his fellows; he has touched truest wisdom, and lives and dies happy.

"We had grown used to it all," says Jill, sighing; "to the short commons, and shorter frocks; the bills, the Chancellor's extortions, and *his* hypocrisies; but we have rubbed along somehow, and in spite of everything we have been happy—happier than we shall ever be up in London."

"Perhaps Cynthia and Bell will be kind," says Hetty, looking into the heart of the fire; "we shall be asked to their great parties sometimes, you know, and—"

"You will go to them in the frock you have on," I say ruthlessly, "and they will be proud of you, no doubt. No, our sisters' paths and ours will lie far apart; they are not at all likely to clash." Hetty answers nothing, but hers is the silence of rebellion, not assent.

"Uncle Golightly and Aunt Theodosia are our guardians," I say, addressing Uncle John James, "and as they have decided that Sieviking is to be sold, we can't prevent their doing it. That is now their business; ours is to find some lodgings to which we can shift at the June quarter. But before settling anything we must know exactly what we have to live on. I don't like taking Pink May's money—she will have to break up her

little home, and send the cats and dogs adrift ; and at her time of life she won't care about roughing it, as we shall have to do—"

"Not so *very* old, after all," says Pink May herself (who has entered unobserved), bridling very much, "though your Aunt Theodosia did insinuate that I was past an offer of marriage ; and the pets don't eat much, Dick ; but it's only two hundred a year."

"We can just live on it," I say, thinking hard ; "pre-supposing that we are all as idle as sloths, and as unlucky as poor people usually are, we can just manage to keep body and soul together on it. We won't talk of ever paying you back," I add, giving her a kiss, "for we never could—the kindness—but if ever we grow rich, you shall go to court, aunt, in a train a mile long. I shall start for London soon, and see what is to be got."

"Sieviking is not sold yet," says Anak, grumblingly ; "we're living rent free at any rate ; and it's throwing money away to go to town as long as we can stay here."

"Every hour we remain," I say, restlessly, "is one hour of hard work lost,—sets us farther from regaining Sieviking. We must look forward, not back ; work, not lament ; and the sooner we are out in the world, the better."

"That's sense," says John James, as he rises from his chair. "And, nephew, if I may call you so, I'll meet you at Waterloo Station at one o'clock mid-day, this day week, and go with you to an old friend of mine in the profession, who will put us in the way of all we want to know ; and at the same time we'll just look round for a house to hold all these young people. And now, Good-bye everybody, and God bless you."

"I'll go out with you," I say, when his farewells are concluded ; and signing to Jill to keep every one in the schoolroom if possible, I follow him down the stone passage.

When we reach the hall, he is turning off to the stables, but I put my hand on his arm, and as he turns, surprised,—

"I'm going to pay Mr. Titmarsh a visit," I say quietly ;
"will you come with me?"

He looks at me for a moment, then grips my hand without a word, and follows.

How impossible is it to hear a footfall on these carpets Boreas himself would be constrained to enter yonder door as gently as a zephyr.

It swings back as on velvet, and the sound of a mildly-complaining voice makes itself audible to our ears. At first we imagine it to be raised in soliloquy, until a distant figure stooping over a half-filled trunk becomes visible.

"Do not pack the Cuyp, Marshall; it was given to me by my late wife, to whom it was presented by *her* previous husband, who received it from his first wife, widow to John Sieviking; but I will take nothing with me about which a question can be raised, and poorer far than I entered Sieviking, I am proud to say, I leave it."

"Yes, sir."

"The packing is nearly all done?"

"Everything but what I could finish in half-an-hour, sir," says Marshall, intent on his box.

"You will go with me as far as—"

"Ruig, sir," says the man.

"Rouen," corrects Mr. Titmarsh: "you will leave me there; and if the—ah—mission for converting the—ah—cannibals should be unsuccessful, and I return to this country, you will re-enter my service."

"Yes, sir."

"I ought to have some success among them," says Mr. Titmarsh, regarding meditatively the glass of *curaçoa* in his hand; "I have lived among savages for four years now, and should know something of their little ways; but I don't fancy the climate will agree with me. I shall become consumptive, I feel sure of it, and return to die—but recover."

A respectful giggle from Marshall announces his appreciation of the joke.

"I think you may as well give a hint in the village that I am leaving to-morrow, Marshall; they all feel for me here. I am going to a foreign land to work, perhaps die, for my step-children. You understand; and a little sympathy on my departure would be very grateful to me."

"I understand, sir," says Marshall, with another smile.

"No one shall ever say that I shirked my responsibilities—that I ran away," says Mr. Titmarsh, rising with dignity, a dignity that somewhat leaves him, as he comes face to face with—me.

"Nobody will ever say that you ran away," I say, walking close up to him, "for every one will know that you were kicked out, like the swindler that you are. Now then, I give you half-an-hour in which to get your traps together; if they are not ready by that time, you will go without them. Do your work, Marshall."

"Remove this boasting young fool," says Mr. Titmarsh, white with passion, and turning to the man.

Marshall advances, not daring to disobey; but when he is within reach, and without stirring a foot, I give him one between the eyes that sends him backwards till he reaches the open box, into which he tumbles, nose and knees, in a heap.

"Half-an-hour," I say, consulting father's watch; "there's a train that leaves the nearest station in an hour and a half—you'll just catch it. I will harness White Bess and bring her round, so that Marshall may only have to pack."

I march across to the box in which he is still doubled up, pick him out of it, set him on his feet with a shake, and leave him.

"Just stay here, and see that thief doesn't pack up some of our things in mistake for his own," I say, addressing John James; "don't take your eye off him for a single minute, or even let him go upstairs without you."

Leaving him to this agreeable task, I betake myself to the stable, and by the aid of a lantern, for by now it is quite dark,

proceed to harness White Bess. As I lead her forth, a dolorous blast from the garden causes her to shy violently. The cornet-player is at his tricks again, and so much the better if he fixes the attention of the rest upon him. I want to get rid of Mr. Titmarsh by myself; there is something mean in the notion of our all setting on him together.

When the phaeton is ready, I lead Bess round to the front door, the door that is so rarely opened, but that to-day has opened and shut to more than one unwelcome guest.

I re-enter the house; the coast is clear, apparently every one is in the garden trying to catch the ghost. Mr. Titmarsh is the sole occupant of his room, of which the blinds are pulled down and the candles lit. He is sitting as negligently as usual in his accustomed place, but the charm of the room is gone with the disappearance of the thousand trifles that gave it character. Marshall is an expert packer; he will not leave much behind him.

The half-hour is nearly up," I say, quietly. "Evidently you have no hoards of money secreted in these rooms, or you would not be sitting so quietly there. Only a vulgar thief would do that—and you are an artist in your line."

I go to the foot of the staircase by the side of the conservatory, and call to Marshall. "Time's up. Bring down your master's trunks, or you go without them. Those too heavy to take can be sent after you."

There is a sound as of heavy weights being dragged to the head of the staircase. I return to the library.

"I'll be even with you for this, young Dick," says Mr. Titmarsh, with a curse, as I face him again—and he is.

There comes a day when even as he has dashed the light and happiness out of my life as a youth, so he hurls from my lips the cup of happiness lifted to them as a man; but this I do not know to-night, as I laugh aloud in bitter scorn of his threat.

"You!" I say, with an intensity of scorn that it is sin to

feel for even the vilest of God's creatures ; "you have taken our gold, but you can never touch *us*—take our dross and go your way ; you were never but a bastard shoot falsely grafted on the good old Sieviking stock, and as such we tear you off, and breathe free, now that we are quit of the dishonour of your presence. Pah ! the place will smell as sweet as a nosegay without you."

Marshall enters, dragging his master's paraphernalia after him. He has been wonderfully spry considering that he labours under the slight disadvantage of at present having only one eye at his disposal.

"There are six trunks upstairs, sir," he says, "all packed ; but I can't get them down, and the phaeton wouldn't hold them."

"They can remain," I say curtly ; "there is only one thief here, the one who is leaving, and as you will have to bring White Bess back from the station, you can remain here to-night and leave with them to-morrow. "I fear, sir," I add politely to Mr. Titmarsh, "that you will have to dispense with the service of a *valet* to-night. I hope nothing has been forgotten, your dressing-case, your travelling-bag, your flask of *curaçoa*, and your night-draught ?"

He grinds his teeth as he buttons his gloves, gives one look round the room and turns on his heel, pursued by the ear-splitting entreaties of the cornet to "meet him once again, for love is waiting, shall it wait in vain ?"

"The last time I shall hear *that* fool's damned row again," he mutters, with a curse, as I follow him out ; but as we reach the foot of the stairs whom shall we see stealing down it, but poor silly, foolish little Pink May, with something in her hand squeezed up very tight (somehow he has contrived to let her know what is going on), and she goes trembling and crying up to him, and pressing this little something into his hand, but not before I have caught a tiny flash of steel. O ! poor women, loving, trustful, foolish women, how good you are,

how credulous! . . . I don't know if there is a tear in his eye as he puts that poor little purse back, and stoops to kiss the hand that holds it, but surely there might be one. She clinging to him, they go towards the open door, where, all being ready and the moon shining very clear and bright, he pauses a moment at the top of the flight of steps to say some last words to her.

Now this flight of steps is very high and very steep, so that the phaeton and the top step are about on a line, and this accident of a height is the immediate cause of an idea. Let it be distinctly understood that in relating that which follows I forfeit all and every claim to being considered a hero, that I may subsequently put forward in the course of my story.

Forgetful of that honourable maxim which decrees an attack on the rear of one's enemy to be as dishonourable as to turn the same portion of one's person to the foe in battle, I lift my toe with such precision, skill, and vigour as to seat Mr. Titmarsh violently in the exact centre of the front seat of the phaeton.

"And now," I say, addressing Marshall, "get up and drive that carrion away."

But Mr. Titmarsh himself gathers together the reins, his dignity unimpaired. He will want something more than dignity to cover him when he alights presently, if that dismal crack as of rent clothing, which I heard just now, meant anything.

"I am not surprised that your last act to me should be one of violence," he says, "but I forgive you. Good-bye and God bless *you*," he adds to Pink May, and he drives away in the clear moonlight.

He carried it off very well, very well indeed; nevertheless, when he is quite gone, John James and I sit down on the stone steps and laugh till the tears run down our cheeks, as they are running down the streaked ones of the faithful little soul who stands within the door, crying bitterly, with the little steel purse clutched tightly in her hand.

CHAPTER XIV.

"She was na ten miles frae the town
When she began to weary;
She often look'd back, and said,—
'Fareweel to Castlecary.'"

AFTER Mr. Titmarsh's departure, euphoniously described by Anak as the "dirty kick out," events march quickly. We have been years nearing the brink of the precipice, but now that we are once over, we don't take long to find our level. Our desirable estate figures handsomely in every newspaper in England, and the advent of a fool and his money may be expected any day.

The first sharp pang is over. Obeying the game instinct that impels all young, healthy creatures under punishment to start up erect and defiant, denying that the knock-down blow just administered has hurt them, we have erred on the side of bravado, and avoiding all talk of the present, have launched ourselves and hopes vehemently on the wave of the future. We have walked to church with our heads higher than ever, and not flinched at the looks of pity or reprobation cast upon us.

We have braced ourselves up, resolved to go bravely through with it to the end; and, after all, it is but the first step that costs, in this, as in everything. It is with the present, not the future, that we wrestle, wringing a meed of victory from it; . . . it is the first determined step planted in the direction of right—the first bold advance towards success—the first agony of bereavement as the first deadly sting of disgrace—these we have to provide against; what comes after, will provide for itself. Once the supreme struggle is over, half the battle is won.

At the end of a week, collecting our energies and rags in one final and heroic effort, we have summoned the Chancellor, and, by a grand *auto-da-fé*, scraped together sufficient money to pay my expenses to London.

There I am met by John James, who, arrived at the terminus but a few minutes before myself, carries me off there and then to the man who is to set my feet upon the track of knowledge.

"I'm afraid Gilly's gone down in the world," says John James, as we pass through streets that grow dingier at every turn. "The cleverest fellow that ever stepped. His ruin, Dick, is the Bottle."

In a room so grimy, so choked by dust as to make a free breath impossible—a room so piled up with books in half-a-dozen languages as to make it almost impossible to pick a way between them, with a skeleton in one corner, a skull in another, while the table is a confused medley of food, human bones, and stunted bottles containing mis-shapen monsters, sits a tall, spare man, in whose eyes burn alternately the fires of genius and the fever of drink.

"Gilly," says John James, without any circumlocution, "I've brought you a young fellow who means to be surgeon, and I want you to put him in the way of becoming one."

"Humph!" says Gilly, turning his piercing eyes on me. "So you find plenty so dull, that you think you'll try starvation for a change?"

"Ay, if by starving I can earn bread for others."

"Then, make friends with a publican, lad, or apprentice yourself to a chemist—never become a surgeon."

"Some have succeeded," I say stoutly, "why shouldn't I? And I want"—I look round at the countless books hungrily—"to try and unravel the puzzle of life, and this is the only profession in which one can do that."

"Can you?" he says curiously. "I should say our highest discoveries were only gropings towards light. Where are you staying?" he says abruptly to John James.

"Nowhere; we have but just arrived."

"Then come here; I've got an attic with a bed in it."

* * * * *

On the morrow, plodding patiently from early morn till nightfall in searching for the modest dwelling that is to contain us, we chance upon one that in no way differs from hundreds of others, save inasmuch that before it is a narrow strip of garden, behind it a grass-plot with a cherry-tree in one corner. Dissembling my delight, I ask the rent, and find that so long as we are punctual in the sum of twenty-five pounds a year from Midsummer next, we shall be free to call it our own.

The bargain concluded, John James is ready to go home again, and it is with reluctance that he accedes to Gilly's rough "Leave the lad a week or so with me—I'll look to him," for Gilly, either by example or precept, would scarcely be considered a suitable guide to youth.

But athirst as I am for knowledge, and panting to set my foot on the first bye-path leading to that goal, I remain, gladly drinking in from my Gamaliel such draughts of advice, experience, and worldly knowledge, as in a few days suffice to set me rubbing my eyes, and wondering if I am indeed the raw, ignorant lad who, but a week ago, would have guarded with his life the traditions that it is now conclusively pointed out to him, *are not*.

He shows me human nature, not as I believe and wish it to be, but as it is, and it is a nature that I hate; and passionately rebelling against this denial of all good in the image of God, I cry aloud against his teaching, and seek to close my soul against light, as do all men at first when light means to them the overthrowing of centuries of blind tradition.

I can but storm—I know not how to reason; a belief is disproved, an illusion blown aside by every syllable that falls from his lips—"For all that you destroy, all that you take from us, give us something better!" I cry, not knowing how when this fever of doubt has spent itself I shall come back to the spirit if not the letter of the old religion—how, as I study it in that Book into which no blunder or error can possibly

creep—that which is traced by the finger of the Almighty upon earth, where each insignificant footstep on the ground covers a chapter in the world's history, where worship of the thing rises to worship of the Maker, it will bring me nearer to my God than I have ever been before. The giant forces that move in cloud and river, and field and sea, form the "mighty sum of things for ever speaking" with a voice that cannot lie . . . it is only the human one that does dishonour to its Maker. I have cried aloud for knowledge—I have got it—experience, too, that Coleridge compares to the stern-lights of a ship casting light only on the track that has been traversed—and which should avail me something, were the experience given, not bought, ever known to make a man proof against mistakes. I came to Gilly a boy, I leave him a man with (theoretically) a knowledge of life that many an aged one might envy. For this man has lived in every sense of the word—his wisdom is ripe, he has seen life in its every phase, it is as an open book to him, and bitter indeed is the reading he expounds to me out of it.

Plato calls words "the shadows of thoughts," but as I hearken to this man's speech, I am more inclined to cry with Mirabeau,—“Words are things.” Alas! that after a magnificent peroration that sweeps me away on the tide of its eloquence, I should half an hour later see the vigorous hand relax, the fire of those eagle eyes that looking upward have found light, grow wandering, the splendid light of the intellect quenched in the fumes of intoxication!

Perhaps the great trouble at which John James dimly hinted was the root of this man's degradation, or the weakness of will so constantly associated with great strength of brain was alone responsible.

On the last night of my stay with him, his ruling vice goes fair to despatching himself and me by a warm road to the other world.

I went to bed, leaving him prone like Samson among his

books, but unable to sleep, I rose again, and descended in search of a book. Gilly had retired to the adjoining apartment, but though both rooms were in darkness, the candle was conspicuous by its absence, until a smell of burning wood gradually assailed my nose.

I looked around, holding aloft a match, but there was no light anywhere. At last I went to Gilly's bedside, and there found the clue to the mystery. In his arms he grasped the Dutch cheese that just now furnished our supper—with this he had lit himself to bed, firmly believing it to be the candle, while the latter, a-light of course, he had carefully locked up in the cupboard. Fortunately the key was there, the burning wood had not yet leapt into a blaze, and a little cold water soon settled the business.

CHAPTER XV.

“Thought rules the world.”

ARMED with a trunk full of chosen books lent me by Gilly, and such valuable hints or instructions with regard to my course of study as should save me many a weary mile on the road to knowledge, I return to Sieviking with good hopes that by working my hardest I shall be able to pass the preliminary examination in June. I seem to have been months away from the old place, but all is the same. I alone am changed; and as the days go by, and I become more and more absorbed in study, less and less interested in the trifles that formerly made the sum of our home life, I begin to think the twins must be right when they one day hazard the guess that Dick's soul got “changed” in London, and it is only his outside that has come safe home again.

In an attic that looks to the west, I heap my books around me, and sit down among them with the first throes of that

hunger upon me that no man, though he live thousands of years, can ever satisfy.

"Books," says Dryden, "are spectacles to read Nature." The saying long puzzled me, but now I begin to understand it. We feel, but do not know Nature, till we have garnered the fruits of ages of other men's research—of men who, cutting their way through darkness and danger towards light, scarce dared to discover, or discovering, to utter aloud their knowledge, yet which from the first dawning of the inspired thought, to the chain of proof forged link by link, lies perfecting in our hands to-day.

It is a long time since Giordani Bruno was roasted alive for preaching the plurality of worlds ; since one of the wise men of Greece, guessing the moon to be as large as the Peloponnesus, was laughed at for his boldness ; since human beings, ignorant of or denying a Supreme Being, at the same time entertained a belief that beasts were as responsible for their actions, as amenable to reason, as themselves, so that on June 4th, 1094, a pig was solemnly hanged at Laon for devouring an infant ; and in 1506 the Courts of Troyes admonished the caterpillars, by which that district was overrun, to take themselves off within six days, on pain of being declared "cursed and excommunicated !"

Grim with humour, if red with blood, is the page of superstition, ignorance, and oppression ; faint and few are the rays of light that struggle across it, mere indications of those later beams that should make it clear as day with the full rays of truth.

If since the world began, as fierce a war had been waged against ignorance as against knowledge, to what heights of culture should we not by now have attained ? But the ignorant as the many, warring against the wise as the one, by mere brute strength, have been able, if not wholly to crush, to so clog and hamper the unit, as to make its path one of infinite labour and pain. Ignorance is Content ; in its dull, sluggish, know-nothingness it meets on equal ground the knowledge

that at its highest trembles, and cries, "I have amassed—I have gathered nothing"—and hates to be jogged from its repose by light. Light That would be God itself had He not said "Let there *be* Light !"

"Draw not near the light, for it is accursed," is the preaching of those who would deprive man (or, as in Sanscrit, the latter signifies, *thinker* and also *soul*) of the exercise of God's noblest gift, who dub him infidel that reasons as a man, instead of believing as a child ; who refuse to hear one argument, regard one proof, that, while perfectly reverent to God, as truth must ever be, is contrary to the traditions that are wrongly supposed to form the true basis of our religion.

In God all religions begin and end, and surely he worships Him most intelligently who realizes His strength and splendour best, not from the words passed from lip to lip of man, and so handed down to us inevitably corrupted, but in His works, that with no adding to, or taking from, come to us fresh and perfect from His hand.

The Greek religion, in which the beautiful was the divine ; the Egyptians, who worship Nature ; the Romans, who bow to law as the highest good ; the Northern races, who deify courage (strength) ; do not they one and all rest themselves upon the All-Father ?

The old Aryan faith was almost a pure Nature religion—a worship of the powers that were seen in progress around. Slowly there grew a sense, that moving the many powers was the one, greater than all, and so the belief was founded that "there is but one God."

All things bow down to Him, all hearts, howsoever they may have strayed, go back to the Heaven-father, the Supreme Good . . . it is the first and last instinct of life to utter His name . . . "God bless you!" murmurs the child to its mother, with its first stammering speech, "God keep you," cries the husband, when the darkness of death is hiding from him the face of his best-beloved.

Strangely beautiful are some of the Aryan myths, pure and good exceedingly some of the teaching of their great prophets who have risen, and swayed mankind, reckoning well-nigh by millions the units who bow to Christianity. The insolent Darius was proud to style himself an Arya of the Aryans; from them we draw most of the fairy tales that have delighted us, the stories that we have thrilled over in our childhood; and it is with something of a shock that I discover the dear old romances to be literal transcripts of the life that moves about us, and the stories of real life to owe their birth to imagination.

Passing by the frightful Babylonian legends with the gentler Hindu and Persian ones of our origin, we come to a somewhat amusing one of how men once lived underground, but finding one day a hole in the roof, they crept through it, and were tempted by the abundant food to remain above ground. Later, we learn with something like a throb of aversion, as though we were suddenly called on to love something hitherto profoundly antagonistic to us, that the Hindu and Icclander, the Russian and Italian, the Englishman and Frenchman are children born of forefathers who once lived in one common home.

But this is not work, it is romance reading. Let me brace myself up by the study of dry, hard facts, nor, until I have earned the right, lose myself in that ecstasy of wonder that is the most insidious foe to application.

CHAPTER XVI.

"Shall I tell you what knowledge is? When you know a thing, to hold that you know it, and when you do not know a thing, to allow that you do not know it; this is knowledge."

THE scented snow of the hawthorn has melted from the boughs, the May buds have stolen out in dress of rose, and white, and pink.

Sieviking, in all the royal flush and wealth of accomplished spring, lies basking and beautiful in the sun. First, the south wall has grown blue with wistaria, sweetest smelling and most elegant of creepers; then the lilacs have waved aloft their million-scented plumes of white and lavender, and the laburnum, with pensive mien, has shaken to the breeze her ringlets of pale gold. Then the May trees have come, treading on each other's footsteps, sisters but in shape and scent, their hues varying from palest pink to deepest flame-colour; and down yonder, in their cool dark beds, lurk lilies of the valley, thick as leaves.

I find Jill, one day with her head buried in a great cluster of lilacs; she has never had time, or seemed to care much for these things before, but I know that she cares now.

I think it is Jean Jacques Rousseau who says that "the sense of smell is the sense of memory," and Lover who has called memory the "sight of the heart," but of this I am sure, that to my life's end I shall never smell a lilac-bough without the bitterness of this leave-taking coming freshly back to me.

The air seems the pulser for Mr. Titmarsh's departure. He did not go far on the journey along the first steps of which I propelled him with such vigour three weeks ago. White Bess broke down (by the merest accident) exactly opposite the lodge gates of Aunt Theodosia's country seat, ten miles distant from here, and he was assisted into the house by Marshall, being unable, thanks to the brutal usage he had just received, to walk without aid. He sat in a cloak the rest of the evening (Aunt Theodosia said in a furious letter to me), nobly desirous of hiding his injuries (and, he might have added, his rents).

He is there still, and every day we expect to receive wedding-cards. Pink May has gone to arrange about leaving her house, looking like a little ruffled, dejected cockatoo. She is very angry with me, and will never forgive me that kick as long as I live. Simultaneously with one nuisance has departed another. The cornet's voice is hushed, and the mystery of

the player was solved in this wise. After seeing off John James with more politeness than the guest just departed, and perceiving a light in Anak's room, I looked in, and to my surprise there was his stalwart form stretched on the bed—so *that* was the reason I had conducted the little business below stairs without interruption. Advancing, however, and eager to impart my pleasing intelligence, I seized him by his abundant locks, when to my horror, his head seemed to come off in my hand !

As I recoiled, still grasping it, the door opened to admit another Anak, who, with mouth almost as widely open as the brass instrument he bore, appeared as frightened at the sight of me as I was but now by the accident that happened to *him*.

"So it's you, is it ?" I cried, dropping the wig, "who have been giving us such a treat for the last month ?"

"Yes, it was me," says Anak, complacently, as he puts away his cornet, "and I think it was very neat myself—a few more evenings will about drive him out of his mind, or out of the place—it don't much matter which."

"He's gone," I say ; and so the tale is told with much mirth, and many bitter regrets from Anak that his toe should not have been at hand to give the *coup de grâce*, or even one good extra kick "for luck."

A few days after, turning out an old cupboard in Anak's room, that hitherto he had kept jealously locked, Jill came upon the following mysterious document :—

"To teaching young gentleman to play cornet by ear in a course of six lessons, twelve shillings.

"To loan of best superfine cornet, extra compass, seven nights, three-and-sixpence.

"*Paid*—Fifteen-and-six. Bill Hodge, his mark."

So at last we know why Anak never bought the new boots.

Mr. Pitt was here yesterday, and with him came a gentleman rather bigger than the Squiffer, but not so large as Solomon. He did not say that the shooting round about was vile, the

hunting the worst in England, the wooded country unhealthy; he seemed taken with it all, and my heart contracted with a bitter pang as some instinct told me that in yonder little man I beheld the stranger who was to rule over our inheritance. Impatient as I have been to depart, I now grudge every hour as it passes. But the days go by, the last but one of May is here, and still there is no news; on the very last of all there comes a letter. And it tells how our inheritance has passed away from us (may be for ever) to the hands of the stranger.

CHAPTER XVII.

"A homeward fever parches up my tongue—
O let me cool it 'mong the zephyr boughs!
A homeward fever parches up my tongue—
O let me slake it at the running springs!"

THE King is dead—long live the King! It is a very little king who comes stepping towards us across the lawn from which the morning dew is not yet brushed; he smells of civet, or something equally abominable; wears gloves and mous tachios, and a hat that he might have stolen from Mr Titmarsh.

We cannot welcome him; the words would choke us. We salute him in silence, but he does not seem to mind, or even notice our omission, for he is staring with all his might at Hetty.

As they pair off together, I see his little eyes glancing hither and thither, keen and quick, "improvements" in them, surely; and I tremble for the fate of our old copper beech, and many other familiar trees, more venerable and well-loved than beautiful.

As we follow, Anak, stooping down till his nose nearly touches Mr. Menzies' shirt-collar, announces in a Boreas-like whisper that he "wears a wig."

"He's wonderfully like old Titmarsh," he continues in the same tone; "looks even frailer—he can't live so very long, you know, and then we can buy back Sieviking."

"Be quiet," I say, warningly, "he'll hear you;" and, indeed, at that moment Hetty throws back a sudden apprehensive glance.

"Or, better still," continues Anak, growing excited, "let her *marry* him—then we shouldn't have to buy it back at all, for naturally he'd *leave* it to her (he'd pop off directly after they were spliced)—and she'd marry again, of course, and give it to *us*. Why it's the very opportunity I was wishing the other day she might be lucky enough to get, and here it is before you can say Jack Robinson! If she lets such a chance slip, I know what *I* shall think of her—but she couldn't be so disgustingly selfish, surely—"

"Anak," says Hetty, suddenly facing round, "if there's one thing I hate more than another, it's having my heels tripped up—either walk beside, or *before* us, if you please."

He selects the letter alternative, and still possessed by his brilliant idea, stalks ahead, and is lost to sight.

Jill pulls out her stocking and walks beside me; the twins vanish to some mysterious haunt, and we are able to pursue our prowling in peace and quiet.

It is the 1st of June, the first of the thirty days of revel allotted to the Queen of flowers, and, being royal, she is punctual, not keeping us waiting as the lesser flowers often do, and this morning we awoke to find a garden of roses. All night long the fairies have been at work, trimming these myriad lamps of cream and gold, and crimson, and as the first trembling shaft of sunlight touches them, lo! they are alight, their fragrance rising as incense in the morning air. Where yesterday we saw but buds, to-day are waving a thousand blooms, the old mulioned windows are a very "light of laughing flowers," and over the stone entrance, the cloth of gold roses, climbing, squander their wealth as royally for the stranger as all the years of our lives they have done for us.

This warm breath from the garden has paled and withered the humble woodland flowers that ran before the Queen, and bade the earth make ready for her coming; and even the May is dying, that of the paler hue first, the ruddy scarlet last, and slowly, as if it were loth to obey the season's bidding.

The roses always bring the sun—or is it the fiercer heat of the sun that brings the roses? We are glad to sit down beneath the beech-tree who lifts his head of glory high above his fellows, and upon whose giant bole is traced the green and gold chequered pattern made by the shining of the sun through the leaves.

A pale brindled beauty-moth flutters delicately by. We sit so quiet that a bright-eyed rabbit comes within a yard of us, and washes her face. Our presence hushes not one of the multitudinous voices of the forest, but presently human ones make themselves audible, and in a few moments Hetty and her companion emerge into view. But what is this? He takes her hand, she does not withdraw it; he ventures to salute it, she receives the homage with magnificent nonchalance; she looks a young goddess in her beauty as she moves through the wood beside him. How do girls learn to flirt? Do they imbibe it with their mothers' milk. It is a pity the twins had not been females, for it's pretty clear that there will never be any difficulty about providing for the girls in *our* family.

"I will marry him if you like," says Hetty, an hour later, standing up straight and tall in the sunshine, rueful laughter in her blue eyes, her cheeks flushed to the hue of the rose petals she is pulling asunder. "I am sure I could if I chose—he all but asked me in the wood, and then you could all live on here—the only question is, whether I mightn't do *better*?"

"Better?" says Anak, scornfully, "O! the sinful, disgusting ingratitude of girls! Here's a chance that I'd give one of my eyes for—d'you think if a widow had bought Sieviking and fancied me, I'd disappoint her? I'd marry forty—and here you are talking of doing *better*!"

"He's too young," says Solomon, shaking his wise head

"he can't be more than sixty, and he might easily live twenty years more. If he were eighty, it would be another matter."

"I'd back myself to polish him off in less than six months," says Anak, confidently, who has walked behind too many funerals to have any sickly sentimentality about them; "and as I said to you the other day, Hetty, then you can put on a widow's cap, and if you *should* fancy any straight-nosed Apollo for a second husband, why you will be well able to afford him. Let's see—he's coming here to-morrow to decide whether he'll take the old oak furniture and the pictures—you can let him know that you've made up your mind to take *him*."

"What does Dick say?" says Hetty, turning her yellow head (all the Sievikings have the yellow in their hair, if they have none in their pockets) towards the remote corner where I am writing.

"What do you want?" I say, throwing down my pen, "my opinion?"

"He hasn't heard a word," says Hetty, mortified, "and I was screwing myself up to the point more for him than anybody else—he'd be lost, if he had not got his beloved woods to go mooning about."

"Yes he has," I say briskly; "you are to marry the new owner; Anak has settled all that. Has he also fixed the day for the wedding?"

"It's a very good idea, say what you like," says Anak, colouring violently; "just improve on it, if you can."

"I thought we were agreed that we would not live on charity," I say quietly, "and yet here you are, proposing a life-long dependence on an utter stranger. Would Sieviking be any the more ours because we lived on the soil? Would it be a thing to be proud of, to be loitering our lives out here, waiting for dead men's shoes? No, Sieviking shall be ours entirely, or not at all. You need not get your wedding-frock ready just yet, Hetty; you are not going to marry Mr. Menzies."

"And I say it's a tempting of Providence to refuse such a chance," grumbles Anak, "although to be sure" (his face brightens) "you might get him to adopt you, Hetty!"

"I hope he'll do Aunt Theodosia out of the Esterhazy brown," says Jill, who has just come in; "it's all uncovered, boys; would you like to come up and look at it?"

We go upstairs to the long, wide, many-windowed room where in father's and mother's and the Trevelyan's time, we used to sit on Sundays, clean and orderly, rather afraid of the gold legs of the chairs, but saved from dullness by the study of the pictures on the walls. We enter in on tip-toe, and catching sight of our shabby figures in the mirrors, feel out of place, and possessed by an impulse to run away.

"Whew!" says Anak, looking round, "what would the Chancellor say if she only got in here? Why, the proceeds of one of these cabinets would clothe us sumptuously for a whole year; and as to one of these glasses"—he pauses, and looking at himself over his shoulder, remarks, "Well, I never knew I was such a guy as *that* before!"

"There will be more than enough here to pay Higgins," says Jill. "I wonder, now, if Mr. Pitt would let *me* have the money for the tradespeople, and pay it away?"

Jill's one notion of happiness here on earth is "paying away," and her one idea of heaven is, I am certain, an endless vista of tradesmen arriving, each with a bill a mile long, which she promptly satisfies out of a bottomless purse; this to go on to the end of time. It is the ambition of most people to keep a little something in their pockets, not so, Jill; money to her would be useless could she not instantly "pay it away."

With the morrow comes Mr. Menzies, and for the next three weeks there's chaffering, bustle; the modest bits of furniture that we are to be permitted to take with us are set on one side—verily a broken-winded, bow-legged, one-eyed lot they be, matching our crooked fortunes admirably. Mr. Menzies follows Hetty about from garret to cellar, pressing all sorts of elegant

trifles upon her ; a piano, a picture, a piece of Sévres ; last of all, and in desperation—himself.

“ Say ‘ Yes,’ ” whispers Anak, from behind the palm, where, in sagacious anticipation of this climax, he has hidden himself ; but Hetty, remembering the truths told her by the pier-glass recently, says “ No ” with as much *aplomb* as though she were used to saying it every day of her life.

Does a shadow for a moment blot out the sunlight, as I gaze abroad on Sieviking, and know that one of us might yet have owned its broad lands, and bade us welcome to them from time to time ?

I thrust the thought from me, and go about my work with dogged perseverance. There is much to be done and thought of ; but at last all is finished, our goods having set out yesterday, and the day of our departure has arrived.

Last night a wild west wind arose, and this morning, lo ! the roses were all gone ; it is as though a mighty breath from heaven had blown out those lights of gold, and cream, and red, and, struggling through clouds, the sun sheds but a tearful ray upon the old house, as, at the great gates, we lean forward to take our last farewell of it.

A stifled sob—I know not whose, or did each bursting heart contribute to the cry ?—and the carriage moves on. Ignorant and penniless we are launched upon the wide, wide world !

Book II.

CHAPTER I.

"A' that Peggie left behind
 Was a cot-house and a wee kail yardie ;
 Now I think she is better by far
 Than if she had wed a lowland laddie."

TIME, July ; hour, five o'clock ; scene, the Park. The season on its last legs, and the world and his wife picking up their skirts and scurrying away like mad, desperately afraid of being left last at the rout. Where a week ago horses moved at a foot-pace, they now have room to toss their heads, to step up to their noses, to play their pretty tricks, all in pure sport, as we think ; in agony, as the poor beasts who can feel but not speak, know well enough.

It is well that they are dumb, for if the cry of all cruelly-used brute creation could make itself heard, the puny voice of man would pretty quickly be silenced.

A flower-belt of dazzling colour closes in the drive ; how different to the wild luxuriance of Sieviking ! When it shall have reached its maximum of formal splendour, the fine people for whose benefit it was planted will be gone, we nobodies alone being left to appreciate it.

I wonder if a pair of judges of beauty were planted on either side of Apsley Gate, how many women they would turn back—how many would be permitted to pass through ?

Apparently, beauty does not pay as a profession, for the handsomest women have the worst-appointed chariots, or none

at all, while downright ugliness rolls prosperous and easy on its way.

But, whether pretty or plain, I like not the looks of the wives and maids who, lolling on their cushions, pass me by this afternoon.

In these latter days women are permitted too free an agency, and duty to parents or husband, respect to age, with a hundred restraints and traditions recognized by our grandmothers, are swept clean away. Husband and wife, parent and child, meet on equal terms, and the word "obey" is unknown, save in middle-class households, where virtue still flourishes and the ten commandments are moderately observed. Perhaps the wretched training of women nowadays has something to do with their deterioration. How can a girl have a healthy mind in a healthy body when she lives the life of one of yon poor triflers? Richest food and drink, softest observance of the body, the mind ever idle, unbraced, unstrung—absolutely without self-knowledge, her emotions her only law—how can she be expected to arrive at excellence?

Göthe says, "He who studies his body too much becomes diseased," and if the lives of the women of the upper classes is not a feeding upon themselves, then what is it?

Take them out of themselves, make them *forget* themselves, pull up the rose-coloured blinds, clear out the lounging-chairs, burn the trashy novels, and at the risk of making hoydens of them, set them to emulate their brothers; give them a brisk, fresh, out-door existence, and when you have done all this, the pads, high heels, and paint-boxes will vanish of their own accord, and we shall have a race of healthy, happy creatures, fitted to adorn the name of wife and mother instead of disgracing it.

This London does not please me, it is hollow and cruel; the wealth and the misery cheek by jowl, the one law for the rich, another for the poor, repel me.

Yesterday I saw a poor starving wretch steal a loaf of bread,

and as they roughly dragged him away to gaol, he cried that it was for a sick wife who lay starving at home, with a new-born babe at her dry breast.

Away with him for a hungry thieving hound ! Let his wife and child, now that he can no longer work or steal for them, die in their garret !

Make way there for the great man's carriage, and stand aside, and be covered by the dust that flies from his wheels, for is he not rich and powerful ? Does he not build churches, endow hospitals, and entertain the highest in the land ?

He has ruined thousands by his speculations ; he has thrown off more bubble companies than you can count ; he has once or twice narrowly escaped the brand of felon, but the strong arm of the law cannot quite reach him, and he is free to come and go, to hatch his plots, to work his ends. Yet, betwixt that poor starving wretch and this man, think you, will God judge as these earthly judges have done ?

Again, cleanliness is next to godliness, says the proverb. Is it ? Look at yonder great lady, sweet smelling, fresh as a violet, counting one speck of dirt on her white skin as contamination. You can't look inside her mind, but what is her character, the outcome of that mind ?

Just as devoid of one speck of cleanliness as her body is of one speck of dirt, and I protest that the poor drudge toiling along the street beside her grimy mate, who loves and is faithful to him, possessing a sturdy virtue of her own, is ten thousand times sweeter and cleaner in my eyes than the other.

And you, madam, who betray your husband as you list, but at whom society winks, because he still permits you the shelter of his roof, you are rarely described by any harsher term than *galante*, or *tant soit peu coquette*, while for the poor betrayed creature who sins once, and bitterly repents ever after, there is but one word, and that an ugly one.

Extremes meet, the highest and lowest classes touch, and are welded together in their immorality ; only the one sins

gracefully in purple and fine linen, the other in rags, and in a hovel.

In the month that I have been in town I have kept my eyes and ears open. I have listened, noted, thought, inquired, and the result has been to make me sceptical of the efficacy of virtue, honest endeavour, courage—of all and everything. In short, but audacity, successful vice, and humbug.

"*Dick!*" exclaims a fresh voice with some alarm in it; and, glancing up, I see Hetty and Jill looking as if they had just stepped out of Noah's Ark.

"What are you doing here?" I say sharply. "I told you on no account to come near the place. At any moment you may run up against Bell or Cynthia—"

"And mayn't you?" says Hetty pertly. "I s'pose they'd know their own brother when they saw him, wouldn't they?"

"We have been in Kensington Gardens all the afternoon," says Jill, "and Hetty persuaded me to come on here; she wanted to see what it was like."

"Just for one turn," says Hetty coaxingly. "I knew we couldn't run up against Bell or Cynthia, for they're gone. I borrowed a Court Guide at a bookstall, and saw their names among the departures."

But the Court Guide was wrong. At the very moment Hetty speaks, there comes slowly past us an open barouche, drawn by magnificent greys, with yellow rosebuds at their heads, and behind them sits a beautiful young woman, dressed in white, whose bored blue eyes waken into astonished life as they fall upon—us.

For a moment we stand speechless, then "Run," I say to the girls, and they do—for their lives.

I follow more slowly, first giving Bell (unseen by her flunkies) a nod, intended to reassure her, and am just meditating on the fallibility of the particular paper quoted by Hetty, when I hear the sound of footsteps pattering very fast after mine, and, turning, behold my eldest sister, all out of breath

and blown with running, her beautiful gown held up in both hands, her cheeks the colour of August poppies.

"Dick!"

"Bell!"

The girls come running back; there are ejaculations, kisses, and, I think, a tear or two; then Bell falls to looking at me reproachfully (but with one eye open to see if any one is observing us), and dexterously directing our steps to a less frequented part of the Park, asks why we have not been to see her, or even sent our address.

"We are in fine trim for visiting, are we not?" I say drily, "and your flunkies would lead you an awful life if they knew you had relations who lived in Picotee-lane."

"And where is that?" says Bell.

"Nowhere that you ever heard of—out Uxbridge-road way. You needn't hold your parasol over your face, Bell; there's no one to see you; and even if you did meet any one you knew, they'd never suspect you of being our sister."

"You are a very rude boy," says Bell, colouring and tossing her little crocus head; "the girls have spoilt you, I see."

"In my class," I say, with mock dignity, "man is reckoned superior to woman, in yours he is a mere appendage to and echo of her; leave to me my independence, madam, and I will not fail to pay you the respect due to your rank."

"This is unfair," cries Bell, in a rage. "I have *not* shown myself ashamed of you—I have tried again and again to find out where you were from Mr. Menzies, but he would not give me your address; he said he was forbidden."

"So he was," I say. "There—there, you can't help being a fine lady, Bell, but never fear that we'll disgrace you. Come to see us, if you please, but don't ask us to go and see you."

"Which is the very thing I was just going to do," says Bell; "but before we begin to talk, let us get into the shade." And there is not much further talk till we find ourselves seated

beneath one of those giant trees that would be grand were its roots not usually infested by some noxious insects that thrive peculiarly well in those parts, and are invariably found in pairs—lovers.

I think we have forgotten how handsome Bell is ; or we are so unused to see the beauty that “goes beautifully” as to hail it with surprise ; but certainly since I came to town I seem to have seen no creature so pretty as our Bell.

“This reminds me of Sieviking” she says meditatively, as she leans, regardless of green smudges, against a tree. “I should have liked to see the dear old place again ; but I don’t suppose I ever shall now. How was it that old cat, Aunt Theodosia, or that little cock-sparrow, Uncle Golightly, didn’t buy it ?”

Their talk drifts by me. I do not hear them. . . . I am back again in my lost home. In my ears is the sound, as in my nostrils is the scent, of the wind as it plays hide-and-seek among the gorse-covered slopes. I hear the chatter of the brook as it runs through the big meadow with its border of mock myrtle and agrimony. I search for, and find, the round-leaved sundew on the boggy bit of ground beyond, and follow the trail of the silver weed, with its flowers soft as velvet, while the blue eye of the flax, widely open, is at her post, watching over the slumbers of my favourite Jack-go-to-bed-at-noon.

In the garden the balsams rear their prim and stately columns, and the arched doorway leading to the espalier-walk is one purple blaze of gorgeous passion-flowers.

“If Peter and I were not so poor—so *dreadfully* poor,” Bell is saying, “we would have bought it for you ; of course, we never thought of such a thing as its going out of the family. You were so quiet over it all ; everything was so hurried.”

“We had no notion of coming down on our brothers-in-law,” I say shortly ; “they provide for two of the family as it is, and I should think they have all their work cut out for them to do that,” I add, with a nod towards her dress.

Bell blushes a little as she glances down at it.

"One must be clothed," she says, "but girls, where, *where* in Heaven's name, did you pick up the extraordinary garments you have on? Antiquated I know we always were at Sieviking; I shudder to think of the gown, considered by poor Mrs. Trevelyan a miracle of taste, in which I stood up to be married to Peter, but *never* did I walk abroad clad in such a thing as *that*!"

"It was too short," says Hetty apologetically, "so Pink May gave me a flounce off one of her skirts to eke it out."

"What! is Pink May with you?" cries Bell.

"If she were not," I say, "we should be in the workhouse or the streets. She houses, feeds, and clothes us, for as yet not one of us, strong and able-bodied as we are, has been able to earn a penny that we can call our own."

I am not able to keep the bitterness out of my voice. Would to God mine were that virtue so pleasantly made by Hippias to consist of the entire freedom of man from all and every sort of dependence upon his fellow-men!

"I knew that you had become poor," says Bell, in a shocked voice. "We are poor—everybody is poor; but I never for a minute imagined it to be anything like *this*."

She falls to thinking for a minute, twisting between her fingers a sprig of that herb, coral-rooted, shamrock-leaved, beloved of the good Fra Angelico, the wood sorrel.

Finally she pulls out a gossamer handkerchief, whence comes a whiff entrancing as if from the very "Boat of Foolish Smells" itself, and wiping an honest tear or two from her eyes, puts it away again with decision.

"Hetty," she says solemnly, "if you like to come and live with me, you may. I will dress and find you in pocket-money, and though, of course, Woolmer won't like it, as she is used to having all my old dresses, still if she is disagreeable I can get rid of her."

"Don't let Hetty deprive your maid of her perquisites," I

say quickly, "Hetty may go to you on an occasional visit if we can make her decent enough, but as long as we have a crust of bread—aunt's bread—at home, she shall share it."

I take Hetty's hand, but she only blushes, and half pouting, looks away.

"Go then, you pretty trifter," I say, "but do not expect to have lot or part in our hopes, our ambitions, and our hard-won joys. Take her, Bell, and don't make her feel her dependence more than you can help."

"No, no," cries Hetty, cut by my words—poor Hetty, whose selfishness is neither conscious nor acquired, but constitutional and not to be eradicated—"I do not want to leave you all; but I should like to go to Bell sometimes."

"And what is to be done," says Bell gravely, "if some man (and I have half-a-dozen of the best *partis* in England coming to Hungerford in September) falls in love with Hetty? When she leaves my house is he to seek her in Picotee Lane?"

"If he doesn't love her well enough to come even there after her," I say stoutly, "he won't be worth her having at any price. If any one proposes to Hetty, I shall insist on his knowing our circumstances; there shall be no pretences of any sort or description, and only on these conditions will I allow her to stay with either you or Cynthia." Bell groans.

"Don't blame *me* if she marries a curate," she says resignedly. "Well, we leave town the day after to-morrow, and after Goodwood and Cowes, we go to Hungerford, and the sooner Hetty comes the better. Perhaps Jill will come later?"

"We can't spare her," I say, patting her hand; "the house would be all to pieces without Jill; Hetty is the ornamental part of the concern; she always has a cold and takes to her bed when there is anything to be done."

"Jill is certainly not in the least like the other girls," says Bell meditatively.

"We run in sets," says Jill, who has reheeled a sock since

we sat down; "half-a-dozen of us are good-looking, the rest of us are plain."

"I think Dick is the handsomest of the lot," says Bell, surveying me critically, "but his hair wants cutting. I wonder why directly a man gets seedy and out at elbows he invariably lets his hair grow? I think you might do very well in society, if you held your tongue (of course you can't talk,—very young men never can). Who is it says that to married women and single men are given the keys of society? You ought to marry extremely well, and I daresay you will."

"Heiresses are as plentiful as blackberries in Picotee Lane," I say; "but I don't think of settling down just yet, thanks."

"And, indeed you boys seem as smart at keeping out of matrimony as the girls at getting into it," she says. "Where are Kit and Will now? I tremble to think of what their wives would be—should they bring any home!"

"They earn the bread they eat," I say briefly, "which is more than the rest of the boys can say."

"And the twins?"

"Growing and—hungry."

"I don't know what father and mother were about to have such a long family," says Bell, shaking her head, "twins, too—so extravagant. For my part I consider three children *ample*."

"That is what every young married woman says until she has got a dozen about her," I say slyly. "How is Cynthia?"

"O! very well, but—don't say anything for the world—but she is growing *fat*. Now you know I am plump, but I am *taller*, and it makes all the difference. I dine there to-night, and will tell her I have seen you. Let me see, supposing now—" she reflects a moment. "Yes, we could manage it, I think. Of course she would like to see you. I will bring her down to Picotee Lane to-morrow morning. We will beg, steal, or borrow a brougham; and we can settle all about Hetty's clothes, and the rest of it."

"Pray manage so that the flunkies shall not hear of it again," I say ; "I tremble for you if they find it out."

"My character is gone already," she says resignedly. "I left the carriage in the drive ; they will think I came here to keep some appointment. Heavens ! it is half-past six !" And indeed while we talked the shadows have lengthened, the insects have crept out, and every tree, save the one beneath which we sit, has its vulgar Jack and Joan beneath it.

"Whatever you do," says Bell, as we part with her at the gates ; "don't *hint* to Cynthia that she is at all too stout ; she hasn't the least idea of it, poor thing, and it would make her *miserable* to be told of it !"

CHAPTER II.

"A holy parcel of the fairest dames
That ever turn'd their—backs—to mortal view."

PICOTEE LANE has every head out of window, and all, forsooth, because a modest one-horsed brougham with two young women inside it, has stopped at the door of No. 7. And when that door flies open, and two girls come flying down the steps to meet the other pair, and all four mingle, and kiss one another, I vow they make a posy of beauty not to be matched in the whole town. They conclude their embraces within doors, and I have observed that when women who really like each other take to hugging, they do it with a heartiness and vigour that leave their favours to men very far behind.

They all retire to the parlour above me, where I hear their voices discoursing at a rate that makes me think pityingly of their unfortunate jaws.

By-and-by these two fine ladies, going over our tiny dwelling with a real curiosity, discover and unearth me, exclaiming at the number and size of the volumes by which I sit surrounded.

They turn them over with the tips of their white fingers, to which diamonds hang like clusters of dew, and sit down involuntarily on nothing in particular when they hear for what profession I am studying.

"A doctor!" says Cynthia, and here I may remark she is one of those people who look the finest poetry, but live and speak most decided prose; "what could possess you to go in for the worst paid, as it is the least thought of, profession?"

"It is a grand profession," I cry indignantly; "what other can compare with it? Which is the more noble—the barrister who pleads the cause of a scoundrel and lies this way or that according to his instructions; the parson who expounds matters he knows nothing about, preaches one gospel and lives another; the soldier who is paid to kill his fellow-men; or the man who gives his whole energies to prolonging life, and alleviating human suffering?"

"Bid our gentle Ariel bring bottled beer," says Anak; "methinks after that burst of eloquence our Æsculapius must be dry."

"I don't know but what he may succeed, after all," says Bell, surveying me thoughtfully, "if he learns the art of flirtation in a thoroughly good school, and acquires a distinguished manner. His looks are in his favour, and doctors, now-a-days, are sometimes quite decent people—the habit of regarding them as mere apothecaries is going out of fashion."

"I hope you will not refuse me your patronage," I say drily; "being such a great person, I shall be happy to attend you, or your cook, for nothing."

"Bell, where are you?" calls Hetty in the distance; and a dress rehearsal being announced upstairs, I am presently left in peace, but not before Cynthia, turning at the door (she is last) has remarked, in a tone of deep feeling, "Such a pity dear Bell is getting so stout!"

My studies once broken in upon, I find it hard work to settle to them again, and go upstairs to the parlour, and, once

inside it, make up my mind that if three women make one market, four women make *two*.

Anak, too, is contributing his quota to the general hurly-burly, as I enter.

"Look at me!"—he is saying, in a tone of disgust, as he slowly revolves before his sisters and Pink May, who, in her best cap and gown, sits mistress of the ceremonies; "John James' coat, Mr. Titmarsh's breeches, Dick's oldest waistcoat, Jill's collar—there isn't a bit of me that I can honestly call my own!"

"I wonder if I could get at some of Ughtred's old clothes without his man finding it out!" says Cynthia, with her head meditatively on one side. "Perhaps I could manage that; but how to get them out of the house?"

"Couldn't you let them down with a rope from an upper window, after dark?" I inquire sarcastically.

"No," she replies quite seriously, "because I am either receiving, or from home; besides, we leave town to-morrow."

"Keep your old clothes, Cynthia," I say; "we don't want them. But it seems to me that it is you who are the servants; the servants who are your masters."

"That is true," says Bell, sighing. "If only we could view them in the same light as the French countess did, who when discovered by an intimate friend having her stays laced by the footman, and remonstrated with on the impropriety, exclaimed, 'What! you call that *thing* a man?'"

"I have a great mind to take a place as footman," says Anak, looking over his shoulder at his calves. "I should get a whole suit of clothes at any rate, and plenty to eat. What do you say, Bell, to my accompanying Hetty to Hungerford as man-servant! If any fellow got flirting with Hetty, and didn't propose, I should be there to bring him to book, you know, and I might come in useful."

"You might," says Bell, laughing, "if the family likeness

were not so strong ; no one could possibly mistake you for any one but my brother."

"It is a pity Providence has not arranged things better," I say gravely ; "the prosperous ones should all have been of one pattern, the poor ones of another, so that the latter shouldn't disgrace the former."

"You are a perfect Diogenes," cries Bell, "or do you think severity is becoming to your style of good looks ? When I left home, you were a pretty, good-humoured little boy, and now—"

"Adversity is neither handsome nor pleasant," I say shortly. "Try it for a month, and see how you like it."

"Supposing we try something to eat, instead ?" says Jill, taking a coarse, but snowy cloth out of the settle, and laying it naturally, as one to whom the task is a familiar one.

"It reminds me of the old schoolroom days," says Cynthia, "when we had feasts, and whoever begged or stole the most good things sat at the top of the table, and did the honours."

"It is the same table," says Jill, pausing in her labours, "and" (with a sigh) "I think our appetites are even worse now than they were then."

"But they were very good," cries Cynthia the literal ; "I often look back with envy to the time when I could wash a carrot at the pump, eat it raw, and enjoy it."

"When I say worse, I mean *bigger*," says Jill ; "the poorer we are, the hungrier we get, and though we have all the most *filling* things we can think of, we are always more or less hungry."

"And it is a sad thing to be looked upon as a greedy if you have two helps of pudding, or a second helping of butter," says Anak feelingly.

"There's rump steak for dinner !" cry the twins, rushing in, school satchels on back, but stopping short aghast at the sight of our two fine ladies.

"Now, what are you going to drink ?" says Anak, cutting ruthlessly in ; "we have a magnificent cellar—round the corner, so make your choice, ladies, and I'll go and fetch it."

"They can't doctor Bass's ale," says Cynthia. So Bass's ale it is, Anak departing with a two-shilling piece and a fine air of independence, to fetch it.

He is back by the time our Ariel appears bearing the steak, and we draw in our chairs and sit down to table, as hearty and healthy a company as you could wish to see.

"The best steak I've eaten for years," says Bell, holding up her plate for a second helping, and Anak replenishes her glass, at which Cynthia gives a disapproving shake of the head that is meant to convey, "Fattening—very," while Bell a minute later goes through the same pantomime on Cynthia's account.

"If only the flunkies could see you," says Anak, with infinite zest, "taking you mustard out of a teacup, and helping yourself to salt with a bone spoon!"

"*And* Sir Peter!" says the Squiffer, taking advantage of Jill's head being turned away to abstract a piece of cheese, while Solomon pounces on a hunk of bread, and devours it.

"I can't recollect him a bit," says Anak, applying his eye ruefully to an empty bottle, "but I fancy he was a sort of refined female in breeches—"

A faint knocking at the door, hitherto disregarded, here becomes more decided.

"Come in!" cries Jill, supposing it to be Ariel; and there enters the very person whom Anak has just so happily (or unhappily) described—Sir Peter Hungerford.

"I found the front door open, so I walked in," he says advancing, perfectly dressed, cool, well-bred, but distinctly and unmistakably *cross*. "Ah! Cynthia, is that you?"

"I told you to come for me at four, and it is scarcely three," says Bell, colouring a little with surprise, but still with that perfectly easy air of treating her husband as a mere adjunct to her state, that is altogether beyond the reach of any decent, duteous, middle-class spouse.

"Pray be seated, Sir Peter," says Pink May, all of a flutter ;

and, every chair being occupied, there is a general uprising in his honour, which ends in his being accommodated with the best seat ; while Anak, quite unabashed by the certainty that he has been overheard appraising his brother-in-law's charms, asks that gentleman what he will take.

"Port or sherry?" he says, waving his hand towards a distant cupboard, as though it contained both.

Fortunately Sir Peter does not, like the man in "Ten Thousand a year," answer, "Thanks, I prefer both;" he declines all Anak's offers, who grows more and more magnificent as he finds there is not the slightest chance of their being accepted.

I wonder why one never feels the shortcomings, the *gaucheries* of one's relations so keenly as before strangers? Our eyes become slavish, and take the cast of their's; we hear with their ears, angrily and rebelliously, it is true, but still *with* them.

Beholding all with Sir Peter's eyes, our homely room becomes sordid; the disordered table, with its empty dishes, disgusting; and we, ourselves, instead of displaying honest and commendable fortitude in our poverty, seem to have reached that "point of satisfaction in the low and vulgar surroundings that by accident have become ours, when contentment becomes depravity."

Bell, too, suddenly begins to see with his eyes, and, with that instant ranging of herself on the side of her husband at the expense of her family, that is apt to puzzle any one who has not made a study of the selfishness of human nature, she wonders to herself how she could have found rump steak, eaten with a steel fork, delicious; and bottled beer, out of a cracked tumbler, a drink fit for the gods.

Her fine lady airs creep out and sun themselves; Cynthia follows suit, and we are transported to a world of polite society that we have not hitherto entered.

I don't think Anak's shot at Sir Peter was a happy one. There is a sense in his glances not to be belied by the languor

of his air, and, without seeming to observe us, I am aware that not one absurdity, or roughness of our appearance and manners, escapes him, though it is only after I have been intently studying him for some little time that I discover him to be just as intently studying me.

I wonder is it Bell's doing or his own that he is here?

A remark from him on the threshold inclines me to think the latter.

Our married sisters have kissed us affectionately, but with reserve, and gone mincing down the steps, not half so hearty and handsome a pair as came running up them three hours ago.

"If I can be of any service to you, Sieviking, command me," says Sir Peter, giving my hand the grip of a man, not a *petit maître*.

"Thank you, sir," I say, returning it, "my profession is chosen; if I don't succeed in it by my own efforts, I shall then be grateful for your patronage."

"Take care pride is not your ruin," he says carelessly, and so goes, leaving one bright face only among those clustered about the door—Hetty's.

When they are really gone, she undoubles her pretty fist, and shows me what is tightly squeezed up inside it.

"There!" she cries triumphantly, "and Jill and I are going off to Whiteley's the first thing to-morrow morning to spend it!"

A trip to Whiteley's, with money in her pocket, is to Hetty as exquisite an enjoyment as "paying away" is to Jill.

CHAPTER III.

"How far this little candle throws its beams,
So shines a good deed in a naughty world."

"A LETTER!" cries the Squiffer, bursting in, on the morning of Hetty's departure; and what do you think? It's addressed to *father*."

We gather round it in silence—yes, it is addressed to John Sieviking Esq., and has been sent on here from our old home ; the postmark is Canadian. It lies on the table before us, no one offering to break the seal, till Jill says, in a low voice,— /

“ Dick, you must open it.”

“ What is it ? ” they cry, as I read on and on, my face lengthening at every word, till by the time I have done, it is almost as long as Pink May’s train.

“ Would you have thought we could cut it any finer, aunt,” I say, addressing her, “ either in our clothes or our food ? ”

“ Impossible, dear boy ; if it weren’t so hot you’d catch your deaths of cold, you wear so little.”

“ We shall have to wear *less*,” I say dryly, “ or take it in turns to remain in bed, for in a few days there will be another body to clothe, and a fresh mouth to feed.

“ *Good Lord !* ” says Anak. “ Then I pity the new mouth and body—that’s all.

“ What *do* you mean ? ” cries Jill, picking up the letter ; “ it can’t be one of the boys—they went away *after* poor father died. H’m, h’m—I remember the name (she looks at the signature) ; he was father’s greatest friend at college.”

“ He is dead,” I say briefly ; “ he was dying when he wrote that letter—a postscript in another hand says so—and he bequeaths his little daughter to his old friend John Sieviking, praying of him to support her out of his plenty till she is able to earn her own bread.”

“ Our plenty ! ” The letter reads like a grim jest. “ A second postscript says that she sails by the same ship as brings the letter,” says Jill, turning over the page, “ and that the captain will see her to her journey’s end. Why, Dick ! she must be at Sieviking at the present moment.”

“ I say, she’ll be cutting Hetty out with old Menzies,” remarks Anak. “ Does it say how old she is ? ”

“ Fourteen.”

“ And her name ? ”

"Charolais."

"Do you expect me to do *all* my packing myself?" cries Hetty, putting an indignant head in at the door; whereupon Jill, who is indeed the hard-working little beast of a bee from which Hetty, as the Aphides of the species, is wont by blandishment to wheedle its store of honey, vanishes, with the question of the stranger but half discussed.

"We can't send her back again," says Anak, "it would cost too much. She shall have half of my grub, and I'll give up beer; and she can wear Hetty's old gowns—I daresay she'll manage somehow."

"She will have to be educated," I say, walking up and down; "we shall be bound in honour to do more for her than for ourselves. It's just another spiteful trick served us by that jade, Fortune."

"Poor little soul!" says Pink May, "she must be lonely and miserable enough in a strange country. I wonder where she is?"

We are not long left to wonder.

On the morrow a letter comes from Mr. Menzies himself, announcing the arrival at Sieviking of a little young lady, and a big old sea captain. The latter departed again immediately, satisfied with Mr. Menzies' promise that he would deliver the young lady safely to the heirs of the body of John Sieviking.

For the present the housekeeper has taken charge of her, and Sieviking is quite at her disposal, so long as she is inclined to remain, *après*—will somebody fetch her, or shall he send her properly escorted to town?

"She must be fetched," decides Jill, "unwelcome though she be, we can't use her so inhospitably as to let her come alone; but who is to go?"

"I suppose I must," I say, in answer to her anxious glance; and within an hour, for time with me is precious, I am on my road to Sieviking.

I feel as a ghost must who revisits his former haunts, as I

alight at the familiar station, and take my way by the short cut, through the woods, to my old home.

Where shall I find this Charolais, in the house with the garrulous old duenna, or counting the apricots on the south wall, or looking through the bars of the old schoolroom window at the formal courtyard, beyond?

I wander on and on, as in a dream . . . these cool silent glades, these drowsy solitudes, are they indeed but two hours in time from London, as they are the width of a world, in fact, from *me*?

I steel my heart against the beauty around me, it is no longer mine—for I am not of those who value things only in proportion to their distance from me—and when at length I pause at my favourite seat, the old copper beech, it is more from force of habit than because I expect to take joy in the prospect therefrom.

But I find it occupied already. Some one dressed all in black, with two comical little green sleeves tied on at shoulder and wrist with ribbons of the same colour, sits in the lap of the mighty old monarch—fast asleep.

Her head is to the bole of the tree, so that the sunlight laces her hair with its golden bodkin, and touching the dark eyelashes, turns to all manner of beautiful colours—a tear!

It must have gathered in her sleep—as I look, it trembles and falls, but no other follows, she only sighs heavily, and the hand that holds the wild flowers on her knee relaxes a little. So this is Charolais. I sit down beside her, fold my arms, and wait till it shall please her to wake up.

This seat must possess a natural attraction for unhappy people. How else should she have chanced on it? Far out of the ordinary track it lies, and Jill alone knew it to be my favourite haunt.

I wish that she would awaken. This wood that is not mine, yet bates not one of her charms because she is not mine, has no power to delight me now.

What a sad little face it is ; yet one more formed for laughter than for tears, surely. How dark the soft rings of hair, how deep the shadow of the dark lashes on the pale young cheek—what slender hands and feet ! Why, Hetty at fifteen would have made two of her.

“ Poor papa ! ” she says in her sleep ; “ O ! poor, *poor* papa ! ” And that sharp throe of pain, pushing her hard, though only in dreamland, she wakens suddenly, and seeing me, starts to her feet.

“ I have been asleep, I think,” she says, looking bewildered, and rubbing her brown eyes, “ and perhaps you can tell me the way back to Sieviking ? ”

“ I will show you,” I say, restoring to her the flowers that have fallen from her lap.

“ You know the way ? ” she says. “ Yes.”

She is taller than I had thought. As we go down the glade together, I see that her head reaches midway between my shoulder and elbow.

“ It was very stupid of me to come so far, but it was my only chance, for perhaps I shall go away again to-day,” she says, sighing.

“ You would like to remain ? ”

“ Yes ; papa talked to me about it so often, that I seemed to know the place by heart. “ O ! ” she cries passionately, and stopping short, “ what would he say if he knew it was *gone*, that his old friend was *dead*, and that he had sent me over here to be a burden to the children ? ”

“ No, no,” I cry, “ not that ; ” for she is trembling from head to foot, and in her brown eyes is a shame that scorches up the tears.

“ When papa was dying, I begged, I prayed of him not to send me here. I said I could earn my own bread, and they might not want me ; but he made me promise, and I could not choose but come.”

We are walking on again now. As I pass each familiar land-

mark, I seem to be moving in a dream from which I shall presently awaken.

"I don't know why I am telling you all this," she says, timidly; "but you have a kind face and—and somehow—"

"You have done no harm," I say gravely. "Lady Green Sleeves, how long will it take you to pack up?"

"O! my sleeves," she says, laughing and looking down; "the old housekeeper said I should get my arms freckled if I went out with them uncovered, so she rummaged out these sleeves—they must have been her great-great-grandmother's, must they not?"

"Yes—don't bring them to town with you by mistake, they would make as great a sensation as Anak's knickerbockers."

"Anak!" she stops short, and clasps her hands.

"Why you must be a Sieviking," she cries joyfully; then her face falls, she colours up with shame. "But I forgot—you can't be glad to see *me*," she says, in a low voice.

"I am glad," I say, taking her two little hands, and kissing her on both cheeks. "To our poor home, such as it is, you are as heartily and truly welcome as if we had been able to welcome you to *this*."

* * * * *

"Jill," I say, later in the day, "I have brought you a new sister—My Lady Green Sleeves."

They look at one another for a moment, then Jill's arms close round the slight figure, and henceforth the child's lot is cast in with ours, and the thread of her life, now dull, now bright, is woven in with ours to the very end; but not for many long years do I know the answer to the question I ask myself as I fall asleep to-night, "Is it as a blessing or as a curse that thou comest a stranger to our home, Green Sleeves?" She falls naturally enough into our home life; the little brown head fits easily into its place at table among the yellow ones. She is oftener sad than merry, yet we laugh oftener, if more gently, than before she came, and are somehow happier.

Anak's uncouth ways, with that broadness of speech which now and then degenerates into sheer vulgarity, insensibly undergo a change ; he passes three whole days without trouncing anybody, and, indeed, becomes so desirous of shining in the polite arts of society, that one evening he solemnly attempts to learn dancing.

"If a fellow can jump, he can dance," he says confidently ; and not until he has nearly pounded the ceiling in, and made everybody ill of laughing, is he prevailed on to desist.

But a few days after Charolais comes—and it is the first stroke of good luck we have had since we came to town—he gets employment in a house of business in the City at the magnificent salary of fifteen shillings per week. Nothing could well be finer than the way in which, at the end of the first week, he hands over to Pink May a ten-shilling piece, as his contribution towards housekeeping, or the magnificent air with which he bestows sixpence a-piece on the twins, or the pride with which he informs Green Sleeves that he is going to give her a grand treat on the following Sunday—an afternoon in the country.

He walks three miles to his work in the morning, leaving here at six, traversing the same distance at night, usually returning home so dead beat as to be even incapable of eating, his only hunger being sleep.

Often after my long night vigils, on reaching the attic we share between us, I pause to look down on the boyish face, and a pang seizes my heart to see how pale it grows. But not from me shall fall one word of discouragement ; every fierce, well-sustained effort brings us one step nearer to Sieviking ; and, with that bitterness of spirit which bids fair to be the ruling *motif* of my life, I find it in my heart to envy the lad his few poor shillings, honestly earned by the sweat of his brow.

For all my daylight toil, my midnight work, what have I to show ? Sometimes when the lust of gold, for Sieviking's

sake, is on me, and the *feu sacré* burns dim in my soul, I ask myself, "Is not my choice a mistake, and should I not be doing better to adopt some calling, however humble, in which I could be earning my bread, instead of living dependent on others, as for years I must do?"

But one hour at my books soon disperses such thoughts, or, rather, they spur me on to fresh exertions; and, by perseverance, who is a handmaid (while genius is a master, and very uncertain in his charioteering), I have good hopes of attaining the present object of my desires.

One should not look too far ahead; one should see what is exactly under one's nose, and pursue it till caught. Give me the scholarship, for which I am now working night and day, and I shall not be long in looking a-field for something else.

CHAPTER IV.

"It fell about the Lammas time,
When flowers were fresh and green,
Lizzie Baillie to Gartartan went
To see her sister Jean."

It is nearly two months since Hetty started off, in all the flush of her high hopes, and youth and beauty, for Hungerford. Tales of her doings filter through to us from Jill, and from these accounts it would appear that she is having a very good time of it generally.

We, too, have had our modest share of good luck, for I have won my scholarship, and something of that feeling of independence, after which I have lately longed so bitterly, is mine. Anak, too, has got a rise of five shillings a week, so that in his opinion Sieviking is half won.

In these last days of September, that to me are an oasis of rest between the cessation of one toil and the commencement of another, our little home seems to me a very happy one.

We have ease of heart, freedom from debt, moderate reward for honest endeavour, love for and trust in one another; and when of evenings the curtains are drawn, and the lamp is lit, one could not wish to see a happier, healthier circle of faces than that which clusters round the old school-room table. Our dear Pink May knits, Jill mends and sews, Green Sleeves gallantly attacks a piece of woolwork destined to cover the sofa with glory when finished (if ever), Anak makes nets, and the Squiffer and Solomon take it in turns to read aloud to the workers.

But oftener still I take the volume in my hands as I sit in father's old chair by the fireside, and, with a zest that only recent hard work could give, plunge into that world of fiction which has hitherto been a sealed book to me.

The "Pickwick Papers," "Vanity Fair," "Jane Eyre," "Lorna Doone," the "Mill on the Floss"—these are the books that, told off on the fingers of one hand, will to my life's end constitute to me the whole library of fiction. There is one other book that fascinated me to an extraordinary degree, that I have read and re-read with delight—"Far from the Madding Crowd." I had been dipping into the novels of the inferior writers of the day—principally, I think, to heighten by contrast my enjoyment of the others, and coming across this book by chance, I recognized in it the master-hand, and rejoiced in a new sensation.

Shall we ever know the story, the real story of Charlotte Brontë's life? It has exercised many minds, and yet it seems to me to be there, in the book; and somewhere Rochester lives, or has lived, no creature of imagination, but a man of thew and sinew, whose portrait has been dashed down in deathless colours by the hand of the woman who loved him. The story was wrung out of her by anguish, among the bleak moorlands, and in the meagre vicarage at Haworth the suffering within her rose to an intense wail that it never could have done had she lived the ordinary life of other women, the life

that so surely crushes out genius, and reduces joy and suffering alike to a dead level that never is, or utters, aught but commonplace. Had her love been a happy one, we should never have had "Jane Eyre"—no satisfied, happy woman could have told her story in such words as these . . . as no woman could have imagined it, for the language of happiness can never touch that of agony . . . nervous, intense, the cry leaps straight from the tortured heart, instinct with that terrible craving which is the be-all and end-all of baffled love, for whence comes most suffering on earth but through love in one shape or another; either through having lost its object or being unable to attain it? One must have suffered, one must have lived . . . above all, one must be human, and have sounded the whole gamut of earthly passion, nay, one must suffer still, before one is able to stretch out one's hands to touch the heart of the people. More splendid deeds, more deathless songs have been crushed out by happiness than is ever known or guessed . . . happy folks, especially women, rarely come before the world's eye, or express themselves in noble speech or work of any kind; roughly speaking, it would be true to say that to be happy, is to be unknown. And yet these lives flowing calmly on as a river between its smiling banks must surely be dimly conscious at the last of a something missed, a something ungrasped that would have made them wiser and more human . . . and may be with the knowledge that happiness is not the chief and only good, with a dull sense of frustration, their existences are merged in the great ocean of eternity. To be happy always . . . not mere vulgar happiness, but the special one coveted . . . not to taste joy in sparse and precious morsels, with fierce interludes of longing and pain, but to dwell with it by night and day, to have it ever at the board—it would crush the genius out of any man or woman who ever lived. Had Byron's feet been alike, should we ever have heard of him? His superb capacity for enjoyment, his pre-eminent fitness for

happiness in every form would probably have smothered the genius in him, he would have lived and died not an active worshipper, but a passive one. The anguish of wounded pride stung him into deathless speech, just as privation and adversity have forced into the effort that ends in fame, those who in prosperity had been for ever obscure.

I wonder, is there one song of Burns that was not suggested by what he felt, or heard, or saw? Born of an emotion, an experience, an incident, it sprang living and real from the heart, as something known, not imagined; felt, not guessed; and being flashed down in hot blood, while its divine truth yet thrilled him, lives to us for ever and ever on the page of fame. He was not of those who shut themselves up evolving out of their inner consciousness, which may or may not be healthy, images, that if brilliant, are also likely to be eccentric and untrue to life, he was out and about, living, enjoying, suffering, observing the manifold phases of life passing before him in quick succession, and ever throwing some new light upon his mind.

What are the deeds, the songs, the works that touch us most, bringing the tear to the eye, the throb to the heart—in a word, that make us rejoice in, and proud of, our humanity? Those that have arisen out of a noble impulse, a generous thought, a keen sympathy with the joys and sorrows of mankind—either of these is that touch of nature which makes the whole world kin, and sets us laughing or weeping as the poet bids.

And it seems to me that writing should come, first, from what we experience, and observe in ourselves; secondly, in what we experience from, and discover in others. A man should be constantly accumulating something so that he may have the wherewithal to draw upon; and when one sees a man who should be at his brain work, idling about, smiling at a flower, standing still in the street to watch any one of those chance sights that, to the understanding eye, form an idyll or a tragedy, be sure that this man is enriching heart and brain, laying in a stock that he will draw upon later. To him all

things are precious, and in the commonest, most vulgar surroundings he will discover a ray of humour and beauty—in a word, he will learn something.

I wonder no one has ever defined genius as the faculty of acute observation, with the two-fold combination of an exquisite susceptibility to truthful impressions, and the power of uttering the same, whether in deed, work, or speech, magnificently. For to one man is given feeling, the power of a subtle and perfect appreciation of truth, that makes his mind a crystal mirror to reflect every shape and form of beauty, but, at the same time, is denied to him the gift of expression; and while his life is a dumb poem, a sublime worship of his Creator (has not Plato said, "The good justly comes to be identified with God himself"?) he is to those around him a clod, who utters naught, because he has naught to utter, not that he *would* speak, but cannot. The mighty soul, bound in fleshly withies, travails inarticulately, or else struggles not at all, content *to be*, and, ceasing, leaves no trace. Yet who shall say that somewhere the store of beauty, to which he has silently added, is not the better for this humble existence that, in life and death alike, rises as an exhalation to its Maker?

Above him may there not be written,—

"He is made one with Nature; there is heard
His voice in all her music—from the moan
Of thunder to the voice of night's sweet bird;
He is a presence to be felt and known
In darkness and in night, from herb and stone,
Spreading itself where'er that Power may move
Which has withdrawn that being to its own. . . .
He is a portion of the loveliness
Which once he made more lovely."

Although of one whose powers of expression were exquisite as his perception of the beautiful, who in early youth achieved immortality, but died broken-hearted, not knowing that he had won it, were these words written; yet I often think that the

man who feels it all, the pathos, the beauty, the poetry of nature, yet never utters his delight, is he who worships and understands his Maker best.

I have seen a man stand before a picture, its beauty sinking into his soul as rain into moss, understanding it to the inmost fibre of his nature, yet no more capable of expressing his delight in it than he was of painting it. I have seen another to whom has been vouchsafed the gift (at best a tawdry one) of picturesque language pause before that same picture, and, without understanding or appreciating it one whit, turn aside to criticize it in such language as commanded every man's attention.

Take a third man, a keen observer, who has the nicest faculty of judgment, and the capacity of penetrating into and distinguishing between the differences of all things within his reach. But ten to one if this faculty of observation alone wrought to its highest perfection, do not subordinate to it his appreciation of the beautiful, so that his speech, caustic, witty, and pregnant, may yet lack that touch of human nature which finds an echo in our hearts.

Thus one man feels, but cannot express, another expresses but cannot feel; a third observes, but expresses half of the truth only. It is the triple combination that makes a man that vehicle of communication between the higher and lower ranks of intellect that we call genius.

I rouse myself with an effort—what is this? Daylight, clear and pure as when it rises over Sieviking woods, is lighting yonder windows; for the rest, the room is in darkness, yet, when I ceased to read, not more, methought, than a few moments ago, the lamp was burning still, and the clock had just done striking one. I must have been dreaming for hours. Adieu, pale dreams! To-day, this 1st of October, the real business of my life begins; and the struggle I have so steadfastly sworn shall end in Sieviking and honour, commences.

CHAPTER V.

“ There were three ladies in a ha’,
Fine flowers i’ the valley ;
There came three knights among them a’,
Wi’ the red, green, and the yellow.”

WITH the first December snow and rain comes Hetty, all rosy and blooming, a mere bundle of furs and velvets, yet contriving to look the softest, most beautiful thing imaginable, as she hugs us in turn, and vows she is rejoiced to be home again.

I suspect there is some hidden cause for this gay good-humour ; that some little fount of sweetness within turns all to sunshine without, and I look keenly at her left hand, when by-and-by she comes to my side with all her fine trappings laid aside.

She catches my glance and shakes her head (we are alone), blushing a little, then says,—

“ But he’s coming.”

“ Here ? ”

She nods—and Jove himself could not surpass the consequence of that nod.

“ Brave Hetty,” say, patting her shoulder ; “ and now tell me how it all happened.”

“ He is an elder son,” says Hetty gravely ; “ but he is plain Mister—Bell was furious because I would not accept a horrid, little old Duke, much older than Mr. Menzies, and without any teeth.”

“ That must have been a great sacrifice on your part,” I say ; “ but perhaps this one has none either.”

“ He is very good-looking,” she cries, firing up ; “ but do you know (she drops her voice) I feel sure he thinks me a perfect little lump of stupidity and vanity, yet can’t help liking me— isn’t it odd ? ”

"Very—if your body had not happened to be so much better than your soul. But I'm beginning to have hopes of you, Hetty."

"I told him," says Hetty, "and Bell cried with rage when I told her I had done it, that we were very poor people; that we lived at the wrong end of London; that I had taken in the bread with my own hands; and that I had a brother in a *workhouse*; and when he asked where we lived, I told him *Fine Lane*, and he took out his pocket-book and wrote it down."

"And when did he ask you to be his wife, Hetty?"

"He has never asked me that," she says, hanging down her yellow head; "he has not even told me that he loves me, but I know it—he kept all other men away, and gave me no chance of liking any one else."

"Hetty," I say suddenly, "do you love this man?"

I find no answer in her blue eyes, the eyes that should be so much more earnest and beautiful than when she went away, they are shallow and sweet as ever; and I wish with all my heart I could see how—

"In her soul a grace hath reigned"

It might turn our pretty butterfly into a woman worthy of a richest man's love.

"And how—well, how respectable you are looking, Dick!"

quickly, as Anak comes in.

"Why he?" says the latter, looking at me with beaming

eyes: "and all of his own earnings, too—he saved eighty

out of the hundred John James gave him for his fees,

the scholarship, and when he sent it back, the old

man said Dick had earned it—so Dick's

and we've all got clothes now that were made for

Dick puts up bodies—~~and~~ bodies," says the Squiffer,

"and people have to stand in a row while he

looks down their throats. He's going to take *me* round the wards with him one day ; won't it be fine ? ”

“ I'm not afraid of what I should *see*,” says Solomon, deliberately ; “ but I won't go there, especially when there are bodies about, for fear something might happen.”

“ You're afraid,” says the Squiffer, contemptuously ; “ *I ain't*.”

“ I'm not,” says Solomon ; “ but I read in a book, the other day, that the galvanic process was once tested upon the body of a man who had been hanged for murdering his wife. Well, when it was applied first to the face, the corpse's jaw began to quiver, the muscles were fearfully contorted, and one eye actually opened. Presently the right hand was raised and clenched, the legs and thighs began to move, and every one present thought he was on the point of being restored to life.”

“ Well,” says Anak, “ and what of that ? It frightened 'em a bit, I 'spose, I think it would me ; but what harm could the poor beggar do anybody if he was dead ? ”

“ But he did,” says Solomon, in a sepulchral voice. “ When the right hand was raised in the way I told you of, it struck one of the men standing by, who died *that very afternoon* of the shock.”

“ Don't talk such a pack of rubbish,” I say, rousing myself from thoughts of Hetty and Hetty's lover ; “ come, are we to have any tea to-night ? ”

The round table is all the brighter for our pretty girl. For a few days the house is gay with her laughter and happy voice ; but when a week has gone by she begins to droop, she starts at every sound, and into her eyes comes that look of anxious listening that is never seen where a woman's course of true love is running smooth.

“ I told you so,” writes Bell about this time. “ How could you expect to see any more of a man who knew you lived in *Picotee Lane* ? And he is likely to be even a better match than the Duke, for through the death of his cousin, last week,

he is now heir presumptive to the marquissate of D——. You chose to be guided by a school-boy's advice instead of mine, and now you see the consequences."

"I am not sorry I told him, though," says Hetty with unconscious worldliness, "because I am certain that if he ever found me out deceiving him in the least thing, he would never marry me."

"If he is worth his salt he will come," I say: "it is a poor love that is dependent on circumstances and surroundings. If the name of Picotee Lane has frightened him away, you are well rid of him."

But I have little leisure for Hetty's love troubles; work, hard by day, harder still by night, absorbs me entirely. Often I do not go to bed at all; but when at morning I open my study door, I never fail to find Green Sleeves, with cup and platter beside her, containing the food that I have not felt the lack of till I see it.

Green Sleeves!—little heart!—I do not think that in these days we fully realize how much of the peace and happiness of our little home is due to thy bright and gentle presence.

One Sunday, hard on Christmas, we are all, save Hetty, eating our roast beef with appetite, when there comes a double knock, not a loud, but a firm one, at our modest front door.

"Gilly," I say, pausing in the act of carving Anak's third helping, "he said he'd come and see us some Sunday. You girls had better let me see if he's too screwed for ladies, before you come into the other room."

"I'll open the door to him," says Anak, who has not previously seen him, and whose invariable method it is to keep people waiting on the doorstep while he exhaustively (and sometimes audibly) scans them through the letter-box slit.

"Open the door gently," I say, as he sets off, "because perhaps Gilly will come in head foremost"—instructions that Anak

improves upon by a more lengthened application than usual of one eye to the slit, and so very gradual an opening of the door that he is himself only visible to the visitor by instalments.

"You can come in, Mr. Gilly," he says, in a patronizing tone on discovering him still to retain the perpendicular, and he shuts the door and stalks noisily before him into the parlour. "Dick rather expected you to-day,—he'll be in directly—but perhaps you're hungry, and would like a slice of beef? No offence, you know—but I don't 'spose you get roast beef every day; no more do we."

But "Mr. Gilly," who is known not to be ashamed of his poverty, "has lunched."

"You'll have something to drink, then," says Anak, generously, and rattling the money in his pocket (all this I hear subsequently). "I got my wages at the warehouse last night, you know; and there's a pub. round the corner."

But Mr. Gilly is understood to say he is not thirsty.

"Ah! had too much last night, perhaps," says Anak. (There is nothing like knowing another man has a vice that you yourself have not, for breeding a fine contempt of him.) "When I've done dinner I'll fetch you some soda water—though I will say this for you, that you don't *look* like a person who gets tight every night—when he can afford the luxury."

Mr. Gilly here bursts out into a laugh that reassures Anak, who is beginning to think that there is considerably more starch in Gilly's disposition and linen than he should have expected from my description of him.

"Ha! ha! ha!" goes Ariak, "how we have roared, to be sure, over your lighting yourself to bed with the cheese, and shutting up the cupboard with the lighted candle inside it, where Dick found it when he came home!"

"Ha! ha! ha!" goes Mr. Gilly, convulsed with mirth.

"And the time when a student came to borrow a shilling of you, and you were as hard up as he was, and had popped every

thing but what you stood up in, so you took out your false teeth and got five shillings on the gold setting—every penny of which you gave him."

Mr. Gilly is understood to repudiate the noble deed of charity ascribed to him.

"You must have looked awfully queer without 'em," says Anak, "being your four front ones—though 'pon my word they look so real that I should never have known they were false. Well, I must go and finish my dinner. Dick'll be in directly. Here's an album if you'd like to look at it."

Mr. Gilly opens it, and exclaims,—

"Ah!—Hetty?"

"Miss Hetty, if you please," says Anak, from the door with great hauteur. "My sisters are not used to being called by their Christian names out of their own family."

And his manner is still majestic when he rejoins us.

I don't know what possesses Hetty, who has been changing colour ever since Anak left the room, to jump up as he re-enters it, as if about to ask a question; but never heeding her, he goes straight to his dinner, and she sits down again.

"I wish Gilly wouldn't come at such awkward times," he says, in a grumbling voice; "especially if he isn't hungry—and he won't have anything to drink either. He's not a bit like what you sketched him, Dick—he's as decent looking as you are—and decenter."

"He must have come into a fortune since yesterday, then—for he was worse than ever when I saw him at hospital."

"He doesn't know his manners towards ladies," says Anak, scowling; "he had the impudence to call Hetty, *Hetty*, so I took him down a peg or two."

"Why, Gilly!" I say, entering the parlour a minute later, stopping short, however, as I discover the man who occupies it to be no "Gilly," but an utter stranger.

"I am Ullathorne," he says, advancing, "and you are Sieviking?"

As we grip hands, the feeling that prevails with me is less one of surprise than of wonder. How came such a man as this to fall in love with our Hetty? For, though he is young, not more than half-a-dozen years my senior, there is that in his face which marks him out from the ordinary men of his class; not only is there as much sense as birth in his face, but he looks as if he took life in earnest, and could, on occasion, think.

"I seem to know you quite well, Sieviking: I've heard so much of you," he says abruptly. "Your brother says I mayn't call your sister, *Hetty*. What do you say?"

"Do you love her?" I say, as abruptly as he.

"Yes. I should have been here weeks ago, but for my father's illness."

"You see our circumstances," I continue, in the same tone; "they are not likely to be better for many years, if ever. What will your family say to your seeking a wife in such a place as this?"

"I have only two relatives—my father and uncle—and they are both, like Barkis, willing."

"And you love her?" I persist.

"Why not? She is sweet-tempered, obedient, truthful—"

When a man has to argue his reasons for loving a woman, be sure that he is as anxious to convince himself as his hearer; at every word Ullathorne speaks I feel more and more convinced that he no more loves Hetty with all the force of which he is capable, than she possesses the power of understanding such love did she inspire it.

"And beautiful," I add dryly. "Are you sure that her whole attraction for you does not lie in her beauty—a quality which should be looked for only after certain other essentials in a wife?"

He turns suddenly.

"You think we are unsuited to each other?"

"So far as I can judge in the few moments I have seen you—yes."

"Sieviking," he says, after he had taken a few turns up and down the room, "I won't affect to misunderstand you—but, beyond a certain point, is not your honesty a wrong to your sister? I expected a great deal of you, but not such disinterestedness as this, for you have not known me long enough to have conceived a friendship for me."

I do not immediately answer him, for I could not tell him, even if I would, how something stronger even than the love of a brother for a sister has within the past few moments stirred within me; how in this man before me I seem to see the realization of that dream of "My ain friend," that I have long ago given up expecting to find, least of all in Hetty's husband.

"I like you," I say curtly. "I think this marriage would be a mistake. I love Hetty dearly, but she would never satisfy you—you are best apart. Her tears for you will be quickly dried by another lover."

Tactless idiot that I am, a hero even could not bear to imagine himself supplanted; it is the one vulnerable point in Achilles' heel, if Achilles stand to represent mankind, by a wound in which he is invariably overthrown.

And alas! Hetty's lovely face smiling up at Ullathorne from the open page that his ill-luck has planted hard by, serves to complete his disgrace in the eyes of one who, never having experienced the follies of love (or that hotness of the blood mis-named love), profoundly despises them.

"I told her that I should come," he says involuntarily. "What would she think if I did not?"

"I will take care that she knows the truth," I answer, some inward force compelling me, against my will, to make one last effort to stay him. Surely this is one of those occasions when our good angel gives voice through us, and seeks to avert the calamities that in our blindness we would bring down upon our heads?

Not for many a long day—not until bitter estrangement has

crept in 'twixt me and thee, my man-friend, my Jonathan, whose soul, knit unto mine in this first hour of meeting, is loosed but by the cold hand of Death itself—do I know how if this day I might have prevailed with thee, much of the misery of the future might yet have been averted.

But he does not heed me, he is listening to a step without.

"Can't I see my little girl?" he asks with the impatience of a man who, having decided against his better judgment, desires no time left him for thought.

"I will send her to you"—and I go in search of Hetty. She is alone in the little back parlour staring out at the driving sleet and snow, and my heart smites me for the part I have been acting towards her, as I see how pale she is, but wounded vanity will sometimes pale a woman's cheek as effectually as a wounded heart.

"Hetty," I say, sitting down beside her, "there is somebody in the other room who would like to see you."

"Yes, I know," she says listlessly, "Mr. Gilly."

"No—not Mr. Gilly."

She turns swiftly, such a rosy light of incredulous delight on her face as makes me think she loves him well enough to give some hope for their happiness yet.

"Dick—*him*?"

"Yes."

"When I heard the knock, I thought it was—I wanted to call out to Anak not to go, but I could not, and when he came back and said it was *Mr. Gilly*, I could have cried."

"He is a good fellow, Hetty," I say, patting her head; "try and deserve him if you can. And now had not you better go to him?"

"There is no hurry," says Hetty, demurely, who, like every other average woman, will cry her eyes out for, or be prepared to run a mile to meet her lover if he does not come, yet when he is safely within her reach, will not fail to keep him waiting.

"Such coquetry may do for some men, but it won't do for

[illegible]

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THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

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 三、教育
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 五、社會
 六、宗教
 七、藝術
 八、科學
 九、法律
 十、道德
 十一、體育
 十二、音樂
 十三、美術
 十四、戲劇
 十五、電影
 十六、廣播
 十七、電視
 十八、報紙
 十九、雜誌
 二十、圖書
 二十一、文物
 二十二、建築
 二十三、園林
 二十四、交通
 二十五、郵政
 二十六、電信
 二十七、金融
 二十八、保險
 二十九、稅收
 三十、財政
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 三十三、軍事
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 四十、醫療
 四十一、藥劑
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 四十九、綜合
 五十、總結
 五十一、報告
 五十二、論文
 五十三、書籍
 五十四、報章
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 五十六、圖書
 五十七、文獻
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 五十九、史料
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 六十一、古物
 六十二、碑刻
 六十三、造像
 六十四、繪畫
 六十五、雕塑
 六十六、工藝
 六十七、技術
 六十八、科學
 六十九、文學
 七十、藝術
 七十一、娛樂
 七十二、遊戲
 七十三、運動
 七十四、體育
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in admiration and wonder ; this is his delight, and one that on his every visit here he rarely forgoes.

These children with their instincts, how they set the trained intelligence of manhood at fault; they hit truth in the bull's-eye, and know not their own power; and thoughts profound and inspired fall from their lips as though God himself spoke through them.

These two, a whole lifetime of years between them, influence each other in an extraordinary manner. Apart, neither is at his best ; together, one seems the complement of the other, and calls into being all that is noblest and most brilliant in either.

Since Green Sleeves came to us, she being my constant companion, I have been able to teach her much ; but all the knowledge she has acquired has lain dormant till Ullathorne's bright intelligence vivifies and brings it to light, as the colours that lurk unseen in a flower till called forth by the rays of the sun.

Beautiful Hetty, standing by, and meditating on her wedding gown, listens sometimes with a dull sense of wonder, in which no faintest ray of comprehension mingles.

Hetty for wife, Green Sleeves for companion, Dick for friend ; in these days I think Ullathorne desires no more. He is happy ; he feels no lack in Hetty, since there are others close by to supply the need ;—and yet—and yet—it is with a growing sense of future trouble that I see the days go by which elapse before the words are spoken that make Ullathorne and Hetty one. I said to the child yesterday,—

"Green Sleeves, how is it that you are not bright and witty, and clever with me, as you are with Mr. Ullathorne? Is it that you take less trouble to please me?"

She looked at me for a moment, then said,—

"*He* is Ullathorne ; *you* are Mr. Dick."

Somehow I understood by that, how she meant that people who love each other don't talk clever, or even have the most enlivening effect upon each other ; they are content just to

breathe, exist, be happy together ; the perfect independence necessary for the free play of the intellect is almost incompatible with that trembling dependence upon another for happiness that may be characterized as the very essence of love.

And I felt relieved ; for lately, knowing how prone very young girls are to worship, not knowing what they worship, and with an intensity of feeling to which in future years they will look back in wonder, I have had some fears for her.

And so the days go by ; different ones, these, to those thoughtless, ignorant ones at Sieviking, when we lived the lives of unthinking animals, and indulged in that recklessness of mirth that is almost as conducive to deterioration of character as a sullen, revengeful discontent. The preparations for the marriage are simple enough ; they would have been very different had I consented to the wish of Ullathorne's father that the wedding should take place from the house that he never leaves. The sisters too, would have had her married from one or other of their houses, and Hetty was nothing loth ; but when—Ullathorne and I both thinking alike on the point—these offers were refused also, Hetty acquiesced, merely skimping her wedding gown to make ampler the travelling-dress that would at least be seen on her arrival at Y—.

And so it falls that one morning, the pure white blossoms of the cherry-tree looking in at the open window reflect themselves in the bridal attire of the pretty creature who stands within, an hour old wife, by her husband's side.

But on Ullathorne's face is no joy, only a look of doubt, of awakening ; there is something terrible to me in the eyes that leave Hetty's lovely face to seek a childish one hard by, a revelation of what the possibilities might have been, of what the realities *are*, that make me fear for the future of more lives than one.

Involuntarily as from a peril, I snatch the child's hand and draw her back, but his gaze has left her ; it is bent on Hetty, as though in that beautiful, uncomprehending, happy face he desperately sought safety. Ah, me ! that a man's hopes should

be ventured on aught so frail ! Even with Anak, as master of the ceremonies, there is little mirth ; indeed, he has never got over the shock caused by his mistaking Ullathorne for Gilly ; it is a relief when all is over, the farewells made, and Hetty, in her delicate dress, is descending the steps, already enfolded in the honour of her husband's name and position, the past life of poverty cast behind her easily as a worn-out glove—I could have better hopes of her future did she less eagerly and lightly enter on it.

It might be Bell or Cynthia who enters with such grace the splendid carriage, but it is Ullathorne's very self who turns back at the last moment to wring the hands, to look hard in the face of my Lady Green Sleeves. And now they are off, Anak at the very moment of their departure tying on unperceived a favour to the back of the chariot, so that smiles, and may be a good wish or two, will follow them all along the way.

CHAPTER VII

“ Shyning was the painted ha’,
 Wi’ gladsum torches bricht,
 Full twenty gowden dames sat there,
 And ilk ane by a knicht ;
 Wi’ music cheer,
 To please the ear,
 When bewtie pleased the sight.”

THE season is in full swing ; the Hungerfords, Longleats, Ullathornes, a perfect colony of our fine relations congregate at one end of the town, while we paupers grub on in the blessed content that must surely have something low in it at the other.

Unobserved, I sometimes stand in a rare fit of idleness at the railings in the Park with the other *canaille*, and hear opinions, expressed with a rich flavour and a truth that they can't expect to hear in aristocratic circles, passed in turn on

my three sisters, as on their hacks in the morning, or carriages in the afternoon, they pass in review before this most critical section of the British public.

I gather from these enlightened individuals that Bell is a fine figure of a woman, though in her case that solidity of proportion which usually stands sponsor for steadiness of morals is not to be trusted, as other cavaliers than Sir Peter are usually to be seen at her bridle-rein. On Cynthia much the same judgment is passed, while Hetty is pronounced very pretty, but "bored-like and m'appen she'd look more lively if she'd got somebody else's husband alongside of her."

But I also enjoy the honour of seeing my sisters—especially Hetty—in their own houses occasionally. It was with some doubt, and not a little of condescension that the latter, as on one of her rare visits home she came fluttering one day into my den, invited me to dinner, being most particular to impress upon me that I need not be in the least uneasy or afraid, as half the people I should meet were very stupid indeed, and if I only held my tongue I should pass muster with anybody.

"My poor girl," I said, her being grown so very fine a lady in these few short weeks, relieving me of any fear of giving her pain, "I never was one of those people who feel big in a small house, and crushed in a great one, and I am glad to find that you are so equal to your changed estate. If I should come I promise to observe your deportment narrowly, and to be guided by it, while as to such trifling breaches of good breeding as eating with my knife, or making a quotation that nobody understands, why you know I am never guilty of such."

"You are very unkind," says Hetty, with tears in her eyes.

"You know I did not mean that I was ashamed of you, and no one ever scolds me like this, not even Ullathorne."

"I suppose not," I say drily, "and prosperity, and having everything your own way, is bad for you, Miss Hetty. I

don't know any worse training for a young woman who wants keeping in order than to get married—unless she marries her master; and though I think you've done that, yet a woman of fashion has fifty ways of eluding her husband's eye, and I've even known the mere possession of a fine establishment to develope a silly pride and vain-glory in weak minds."

"I won't bear it," cries Hetty, starting up, her flushed face the only bit of colour about her, she being in white as usual, as I think all women should be so long as they are handsome and young.

"Then be true to your better self," I say sternly; "is it by fine lady airs such as these that you think to win and keep Ullathorne, whose heart is of gold?"

"To win him?" she says, her colour paling; "and have I not won him—why else did he marry me?"

"Hetty," I say, drawing her towards me, "have you ever thought of how you must try and live up to Ullathorne, not expect him to live down to you?"

"We are quite happy together," she says, turning her head aside; "we never disagree. No two people can get on better. What more can you—does he—want?"

"Has he never told you, Hetty?" I say sadly.

"He talks to me sometimes like you do, but I do not understand him; I never could understand clever people—we are happy, that is enough for me."

Alas! poor Hetty, if she feels no lack, how is it to be supplied? But, thank God! she is happy, and, as I know, the fault is not all on her side.

"You will come then, Dick? You must not be vexed with Ullathorne for not coming down here; but he is so busy always."

"I know, but I see him most days; he comes to me at hospital."

"He never told me that. I do believe," she adds, halt

bitterly, "that he's fonder of you than he is of me! Well, good-bye; I shall expect you."

"Hetty, you've forgotten something; ever since you were married you've forgotten it."

"What is that?"

"To ask Pink May to your house."

"O, Dick! Think of it, her cap, her heels, her train!"

"I won't have her slighted. Who kept us all from starvation, who is feeding and housing us now but that dear, good, loving soul? Go and ask her for the same evening you've asked me, and then I'll think about coming."

"The servants will all laugh, Dick; it really is impossible."

"Then so is my going to you. There, run along; I've wasted enough time already."

"If you'll promise that she doesn't wear a blue, or a pink, or a scarlet cap—"

"I'll promise nothing. If she wore three, one a-top of the other, I'd not be ashamed of her; and I'd give any flunkey who laughed at her a sound thrashing."

Hesitation, sulks. By-and-by a rustling of departing skirts above stairs, my behest done, and presently, God bless thee, thou simple soul! a comical little figure seats itself at my elbow, and gravely takes me in council concerning the superior merits of blue over orange, and pink over magenta.

I abandon science for millinery. I forbid all colours, and am proof against her petitions even with tears for a little pink. It is a subdued, and even elegant Pink May that a few evenings later enters Hetty's drawing-room on my arm.

I begin to understand Hetty's temporary intoxication better as she advances to meet us with Ullathorne at her side, passing down through the splendid rooms with as haughty a step as if she had never trod any other,

I am one of those who love that women should be compassed round

"With sweet observances,"

but it seems to me that the luxury and magnificence beyond limit that surrounds the upper-class women of the present day must infallibly embellish the body at the expense of or the utter extinction of the soul.

The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, with everything to feed all three—what wonder that one's duty to one's neighbour, the whole pith and marrow, I take it, of all religions, neglected as unacted lies, while the life of every average man and woman is one profound, sinful adoration of self?

"Why, Dick!" says a gay voice behind me, and, turning, I see Bell, blooming and handsome as ever. "So you will come to Hetty, when you won't come to me? I felt sure you wouldn't be awkward—I declare you look quite natural in your clothes!"

"I hired them for a week, and have been going out as waiter every evening to give myself assurance," I say drily.

"As cross as ever," she says, laughing, "and fortunately as handsome. I don't despair of your distinguishing yourself yet—by marriage, of course—there's no other royal road to wealth that I know of. I have *views* for you—dinner, thank Heaven! and that little horror, Lord Cosmo, is my fate; but Hetty's cook is good, so it might be worse—for instance, good company and a bad dinner."

"Florizel," says Hetty's voice close by, "allow me to introduce to you my brother"—and that is all, so I make up my mind that the young lady who is presently walking down stairs on my arm is one of those unfortunates to whom her parents have been more kind than Providence, and who cannot hope to get the better of circumstance until she takes to herself a husband.

"What an insignificant atom one feels in a house like this," she says, as we enter the dining-room, whose walls are peopled by pictures dim as Rembrandt's, the king of shadows.

"Yes; the people here remind me of what Empedocles said

of the Agrigentines, 'that they built as if they were to live for ever, and feasted as if they were to die to-morrow.'

My place at table is not far from Ullathorne's; he looks across at me with a smile as we sit down. We have met before to-day, but in very different company to what we are in to-night—and yet we must all come to that by which he and I stood this morning.

"You are great friends, are you not?" says my companion.

"Yes."

I am hunting for Pink May, and find her at last, wedged in between an old buck and a young divine, and with an air of being equally happy with either that is certain to command attention from both.

I turn to find my companion's eyes fixed upon me with such earnestness as to convince me that I am no stranger to her by hearsay, if by acquaintance.

"Well?" I say, smiling.

"There!" she says. "So you *can* smile—I was just wondering if by any possibility you could."

"Do I look so bad-tempered?"

"No—but austere as a St. Augustine. I think I should like to look like that—sometimes; it would make my occasional good humour so precious. Who was it said that the genialities of a stern man are as effective as the asperities of an amiable one?"

"I think, Miss Florizel," I say, "that you and I scarcely start on equal ground. You evidently know something of me—probably to my disadvantage—while of you I know no more than that your godfathers must have been students of Shakespeare."

"I won't deny it," she says, returning my keen gaze steadily; "I *have* heard of you often from Hetty—and Ullathorne."

"Then," I say gravely, "you are aware that this is my first evening out, that I have been studying the book of dinner

etiquette (kindly sent me by one of my sisters, with certain passages in it *marked*) for over a week, and that I am dreadfully afraid of opening my mouth, lest something should tumble out quite unfitted for polite society. Now, supposing you tell me who some of the people are, while I study their manners?"

"And so lay bare to you my own character!" she says, slyly; "however, for my own sake I'll try not to be too spiteful."

"Then you will be dull—a woman is never so epigrammatic as when she is dissecting her friends' characters. Indeed, one who talks like poor Poll at ordinary times becomes positively brilliant under the influence of malice—do you deny it?"

"No; but malice is not always responsible for the pungent things said at another person's expense. Remember that by praising the absent you usually offend, and never amuse; and to amuse, if she is not beautiful, is a woman's first duty in society."

"To be sure," I say drily; "that is just my notion of them when they happen to be neither wives, sisters, nor daughters. But to continue—"

"You shall not put me out of countenance," cries Florizel. "Confess, now, that you can't go on for ever and ever saying how clever, or good, or charming some particular person is—the subject becomes dull, is quickly exhausted; but what a wide field opens out to your wit (and what is wit, as Lord Lytton asks, but truth made amusing?), animation, and powers of sarcasm in attacking his weaknesses and follies! What vigour of expression is yours, what a warmth of imagination, since for one-half that you know, you must surmise the other, till after half an hour's sound abuse you are in such a glow as almost to love the abused person for the pleasure he has afforded you in abusing him."

She pauses, out of breath and laughing.

"It is very bad," she says gravely, "but it is human nature."

In the same way we always hear of the misfortunes and failures of our friends; but it is a very long while before the story of their successes reaches us. We smile over a bad review of our dearest friend's new book, but somehow the paper with the favourable notice gets mislaid on its way to our hands."

"Are you not very bitter for so young a woman?" I say, looking at her keenly.

"Perhaps," she says, turning her head aside, but not before I have seen how in her face is less a look of disappointment than of that want which one sees so often in women whose lives utterly fail to satisfy their souls. I glance round the table. Ullathorne is in a brown study. Hetty, at the opposite end, leans back as she converses with her neighbour; already she has acquired that exquisite air of boredom without which it is impossible to be a real fine lady. And to think that she once stole small-clothes, and clothed herself in the proceeds! I wish the Chancellor were by to see her now.

If I came here to see husband and wife together, to glean some hint of their conduct and relations to each other, I am doomed to disappointment. I see only how easy it is in a life such as this for the tie between husband and wife to be a slack one, and no one be the wiser, scarcely even themselves.

Bell is eating her dinner with a magnificent contempt for consequences in the shape of fat, that compels my admiration. Sir Peter is studying his *menu* as if it were the Book of Fate. Pink May is bridling and coquetting to her heart's content, and, in a pause of the conversation, is overheard relating the oft-told tale of the delicacy of her complexion when a young girl.

A little pompous man opposite, sitting next to a lady who looks as if her enemies had been shooting roses at her with pop-guns, fixes my attention; evidently some one in his own estimation, I am anxious to know what position he holds in the eyes of others.

"That is Lord Beaudésert," says Florizel, when appealed to.

"His one object in life is to pass for a wit and *raconteur* of the first order. His stories are usually good ones, of which he is himself the hero; and in telling them he invariably gives as the things that he *did* say, those that he *ought* to have said. I think Gil Blas must have had him in his mind when he described a man 'whose wit shone at the expense of his memory.' I often feel tempted to cry out at one of his stories, 'An old sixty!' as people did in Philip of Macedon's time, when anything borrowed was passed off as original."

"They managed things better in Rome," I say, laughing, "where the citizens used to take out their slaves to evening parties to jest for them, and at every shout of laughter provoked by them, assumed an air of modesty, as if they had said all the good things themselves—it must have saved them a lot of trouble."

"But rather hard lines on the jesters, or flies, as Plautus called them; for they were soundly beaten if they failed to amuse, and got their pates cracked if they didn't crack jokes to their owners' liking."

"All that is to be altered, soon," I say seriously, "and the laziest people will shine by no exertion of their own, according to the state of things imagined by a certain ingenious and scientific poet, in which we consist of an *internal* body and an *external* soul."

"There would, in most cases, be more within than without," says Florizel; "but about laughter—I envy any one who has the power of making others laugh. It is a great gift. Rabelais remarks, that the wearers of crown and sceptre are born under the same constellation as the wearers of cap and bells."

"And who gave you Rabelais to read?" I say quietly.

"Women read of their own accord, sometimes, I assure you," she says demurely, "and even—think. Now, do you know that, except to you, I should not have dared to make one single remark that I have made to-night? I should be

voted pedantic, insufferable ; one never *talks*, you know, in polite society."

"You would deserve to be punished, if you did. Is it not Lucian who, after relating how a mob ill-treated a certain philosopher for attacking their superstitions, adds, 'And very justly ; for what right had he to be wise among so many mad men ?'"

"Let us talk nonsense," she says abruptly ; "let us be spiteful. You see that old-young lady next but one to Lady Hungerford ? Well, ten years ago, she worked her wedding veil of Honiton lace, but no one has ever given her the opportunity of wearing it yet."

"She should go to Galway Fair."

"What do they do there ?" asks Florizel, curiously.

"It is just like the London market of young women for marriage, only that over there they manage it in an honest, straightforward manner. When fair-time comes round, the lasses dress themselves in their best, and, their avowed purpose being matrimony, go through their paces before the assembled lads, who critically survey them, and make their choice, or not, as they feel disposed. Miss Florizel," I add abruptly, "is this dinner going on *for ever* ?"

"Console yourself—it is three parts over."

"But for you," I say bluntly, "I could not have sat here one-half of the time I have done already."

And, indeed, as I look around, the table, the dishes, the people, the whole scene, combine to stifle and oppress me. . . . involuntarily I recall the tale of how Buddha, when perplexed and troubled by that ceaseless striving after light that gave him no rest, one night awoke to find his apartment full of the dancing girls who had sought to soothe him to slumber. Some of them lay tossing heavily in their sleep, some with open mouths, others coiled up in uncouth shapes ; it seemed to him as if his apartment was full of loathsome bodies, and that all was vanity. And, rising up, he caused his fleetest horse to be

saddled, and rode away from the palace that was to him but a tainted temple of the flesh, and to which he never returned.

What a life to live—to eat, drink, sleep, and to-morrow—to die? Not a bit of it, to begin all over again, as if the body, not the soul, survived.

“What a happy-looking couple,” I say, glancing with a sense of relief at two fresh young faces at a little distance. “Are they going to be married?”

“Yes—don’t they remind you a little of Artemus Ward’s ‘And have I found you at last, O! at last?’ and the answer, ‘Yes, marm, but if you had come at first you would have found me sooner?’ But I believe he really is fond of her—I have a conclusive reason for thinking so.”

“And that is?”

“Don’t laugh, but he was in love—deeply, every one thought, with a lovely young woman, who was plump almost to a fault. All at once he forsook her for little Lady Bell, who is slight also to a fault. Now, the fascination must be extraordinary that detaches a man from a fat woman to a lean one—*ergo*, he must be really in love with Lady Bell, don’t you see?”

But her last words remain suspended in the air like a big note of interrogation—they do not please me. Without knowing what women should say, I am instinctively aware of what they should not.

“Mr. Sieviking,” says a soft voice presently—a voice that seems to have a blush in it, and turning I see Florizel’s countenance painted with that which is to a woman’s face what a rainbow is to the sky.

“It is not your fault,” I say, thinking aloud, “it is the pestilential air you breathe. But why should you care for my good opinion, Miss Florizel?”

“I do care,” she says; and the intensity of her voice startles me. “If there were more men like you, girls would be different—”

“Miss Florizel,” I say abruptly, “I will tell you a secret.

I have for some time been in danger of becoming a prig ; a little encouragement from you, or any one else who feeds my vanity, will about finish the business. If you look up to me, I must shun your society ; for nothing in the world but being in the company of people every way my superior can cure my complaint."

"Then you must not approach me in the drawing-room, presently," she says, laughing, as she rises and follows Hetty out, leaving me to the enjoyment of company that (with the exception of Ullathorne) is by no means an improvement on that which has just left me.

Odd, irregular, attractive, Florizel's face comes between me and my ears as I sit by Ullathorne's side drinking my claret.

"I should think you and Florizel must be *starving*," says Bell, an hour later, in the drawing-room. "I did not see either of you eat a mouthful during the whole of the dinner ; you were talking at such a rate. But, seriously," she adds, dropping her voice, "I'm delighted that you got on so well together—it is just as brilliant a chance of settling yourself in life as any one of us girls ever have had. Her father, the old earl, adores her ; she is the only child, and her fortune will be immense ; and, as I always told you, Dick, you are a very good-looking fellow, and when you have mastered one or two minor points of etiquette that I will presently tell you of, I see no reason why you should not be good enough for anybody."

CHAPTER VIII.

"Hey, ninnie, nonnie ! But love be bonnie
A little while, while it is new ;
But when it's auld, it grows more cauld,
And fades awa' like morning dew."

TIME flies ; it seems yesterday that Hetty was married, yet I went to-day to see her as she lay on her white couch with

another tiny Hetty on her arm, and returning home I noticed with wonder that the old cherry-tree was again in bloom.

As she held the little creature against her breast I wondered if beneath all its frivolities a mother's heart was beating there, and thought I traced in her beautiful face something of that solemn, wistful look that motherhood they say always brings—as though the Divine breath, kindling the young life, had in passing touched the mother also, and made her sacred.

I looked at Ullathorne, too, as he stood beside them ; there was something new, hopeful in his face—hitherto I could not but blame him, for did he try, with all his heart and soul did he try, to make the best of that mistake in life which with eyes wide open he had committed ?

I left them, trusting that those baby hands might yet bring the hearts of father and mother together, but alas ! with returning health the old Hetty arises, the little child, gift of God, like any soulless toy, is laid aside. The old frown comes back to Ullathorne's brow, the weariness to his voice. If nowadays, not knowing, I should chance to meet him, I should esteem him as neither more nor less than one of those idlers upon whom the waste of life is regretted by none more keenly than himself.

He has never crossed our threshold since his marriage day, but we are constantly together, the love between us growing deeper and deeper, nothing broken by the secret that lies between us, till sometimes I say to myself, conscience-stricken, that it is small marvel he has so little to give to Hetty.

If only they would disagree sometimes—but there are no contests between them. There is simply a total lack of appreciation on her part, an incapacity on his to move or reach her, that completely stultify any notion of warfare. Bell and Cynthia observe nothing amiss ; I should soon hear of it if they did, for I see them often enough, they having taken me

in hand, and stood sponsor for me, so to speak, at the fount of fashion.

They have given up tormenting me on the subject of marriage, being satisfied in the belief that my heart has accompanied Florizel to Cannes, whither she went three months ago with the old man, as the sole remaining chance of extending his life a few years.

And time goes on, and lo! one fine day a white petal flutters down on the dusty page from which I am reading, and I look up to discover how Nature through the cherry-tree gives warning of another dead and gone year. And what have I gained in it? A profound knowledge of my own ignorance—what is knowledge but the consequence of ignorance—the germ of the feeling of Michael Angelo with his go-cart, and the motto “Still I learn?”

I have not amassed one penny; I am not one step nearer Sieviking. I falter and stumble sometimes on the path, so rough is it, so devoid of hope and encouragement.

But for the happy home life, and the mark it leaves upon me (I think one can mostly tell by a man's face the character of his nearest and dearest—he is their reflection; as they make him, so is he, ill-humoured or noble, false or true), I should be in danger of becoming that most disagreeable of all spectacles, a man ill at ease with himself and his Maker, a state of things usually brought about by his own misconduct—or his misfortunes, which are equally damning.

I love my work, but I would see some substantial reward for it; and in this I degrade Science, since he only can study it truly who does so for pure love of it.

There is one gap in our home circle. Six months ago Anak left us to join the Natal Mounted Police, and prodigious epistles in his best round-hand reach us from time to time with accounts of his doings; while to one private and particular fight, in which he signally defeated a bully of the name of Bill, he devotes four whole pages of sanguinary details.

I found Jill crying over one of these letters the other day. She has made up her mind that her boy will never come back, and would start off to Zulu-land if she dared, in search of him. I laughed at, and comforted her, not knowing how in a day yet to be born the nation's heart would quiver through and through with anguish for her slain children; how from end to end the world should heave with a great throb of horror, shame, and pity, while from every eye should rain down unbidden such tears of blood as hitherto no reverse of war, however severe, had caused to flow!

Thank God that my poor Jill, as she kisses and lays aside her boy's letter, cannot read the future.

That she will see him once again ere that terrible, never-to-be-forgotten morning, when at a thousand peaceful, happy breakfast-tables, from the carelessly unfolded paper, will leap out the death-news that shall strike to the heart how many a sister, wife, and mother! When, with desperate eyes, that sickeningly seek that which she fears to find, far down on the ghastly list she will see the name of Sieviking.

Some one was to blunder, and our Anak, and such as he, were to pay the penalty with their lives . . . and how nobly, how grandly, that penalty was to be paid, the page of history should tell to all time.

Page most shameful, most bitter, most glorious in England's history! so long as hearts can beat and eyes can weep, shall ye be remembered, and over the graves of your heroes need no flowers be planted, no monuments raised, for in the hearts of nations will their names live for ever and ever.

Poor Anak . . . Jill will cry night and day—as though one who died such a death as he could be reckoned poor . . . in life, we called thee good, brave and strong, Anak, but no one ever called thee poor . . . and now, maybe thou art rich, Anak, not poor, beyond aught that thou ever wast on earth!

But I am projecting my story many years. We are happy

yet. Our numbers are unbroken, and even threatened to be added to, as Kit, in a recent letter, talks of coming home.

Solomon and the Squiffer grow apace, and have turned to such good advantage the schooling that by painful economy we have contrived to give them, as to well fit either to take a clerkship shortly—when he can get it.

John James pays us periodical visits; he takes the most intense interest in my progress, and is firmly convinced that some day he will have occasion to take pride in it also.

And Pink May, God bless her! is the same as ever. She wears a little more pink in her caps, perhaps, and any trifling improvement in our circumstances is always visible in an increased length of tail.

She has had a proposal, too, from our landlord, who was much displeased at her refusal. He had no idea, he said, that poor people could be so proud.

And Aunt Theodosia is a widow still, and has been heard to say, in an unguarded moment, that Mr. Titmarsh had treated her abominably.

That gentleman is travelling with Marshall on the Continent in search of health. We see his name in the paper from time to time as guest to persons of the very highest consideration, and Pink May has been observed surreptitiously cutting out these announcements, and in the depths of her soul is (we think) firmly convinced that his admiration for herself caused his indifference to Aunt Theodosia's charms.

But we are of opinion that for the present his pockets are too comfortably lined with our money to make it necessary to saddle himself with an old wife.

CHAPTER IX.

"A flower in the dew,
Sweet was its smell and bonnie was its hue,
And the longer it blossom'd, the sweeter it grew,
For the lily in the bud will be bonnier yet."

"ULLATHORNE !"

"Dick !"

I start up in amazement from my work to see before me one whom I believed to be pleasantly engaged in shooting his own coverts at the present moment.

As we grip hands, his eyes fall on Green Sleeves, who had been sitting by me as I worked, and who has now risen and stands before him.

If the past year has brought little change to me, it has brought much to my Lady Green Sleeves, who is a child no longer, nor yet a woman, but just a young thing with the innocence of the one, and the budding promise of the other, and I don't think that on God's earth you could find a prettier, more moving sight than this ; pure, fresh, unworn, with its innocent lips that have tasted neither of fierce pain nor fiercer joy, and its future a blank page upon which will be written just what the man she shall love pleases, none sure could see such an one and not breathe a hope for her happiness.

"Why, Green Sleeves !" I cry, "have you forgotten your old friend Ullathorne ?"

But it is more as strangers than old friends that they meet, and when she has gone away, Ullathorne's face, pale even to haggardness, fixes my attention.

"Anything wrong, old fellow ? Hetty—the child ?"

"Quite well—Hetty gay as ever," he says absently.

"But what on earth brings you to town in September and with a houseful of people ?"

"The Hungerfords are there—Sir Peter will take my place. I've come up to town, Dick, about *you*."

"Has Hetty found a new heiress for me? or do you mean to try once more to inveigle me down for the shooting?"

"Neither—we've given up both notions long ago. It's something practicable this time. Dick, would you like to earn five thousand pounds?" His question strikes my ears like a thunder-clap. Five thousand pounds—a third of the price of Sieviking—is he mad, or am I dreaming? Humanly speaking, I cannot hope to have saved that sum after a score of years of toil and struggle. . . .

"You jest," I say, turning aside. "What I should like is not what I can do. You are trying to help me in some way, Ullathorne, but I said my last word to you on that subject long ago."

"I said 'earn,' Dick—but listen. A lad, heir to vast possessions, has fallen into bad hands; the only chance of saving him is to get him out of the country, and keep him there for four or five years, or till he has acquired sense. The father came to me yesterday in despair—did I know of any one who, at almost a moment's notice, would take charge of him—some one not too old, or the lad would break away to other companionship, but steady, firm—in short, old fellow, *yourself*, of whom, of course, I instantly thought. He offers a thousand a year, and your expenses."

"Let me think," I say, walking up and down, "my second year at St. Saviour's is just up—that's lucky, but these five years abroad, except for information irregularly acquired, will be so much dead loss, and throw me back five years in the profession. On my return, I shall have to enter as a third-year's man—but five years of work would never bring me five thousand pounds. Thank you, Ullathorne, with all my soul, and, *yes*."

"There's not much time to lose. I must telegraph to the old man at once, can you start the day after to-morrow?"

"Yes."

"You'll see Florizel abroad?"

"I suppose so."

There is a pause, in which Green Sleeve's laugh sounds overhead.

"I want to say something to you, old fellow, and I don't know how."

"Say it out," I cry, throwing my arm over his shoulder; "we've been friends too long to begin quarrelling now." (O! my friend, my ain friend, who to-day art more to me than all other men and women upon earth, why didst thou send me from thee, to come back to thee as I departed, never again?)

"Sieviking," he says, "you've kept so straight up to the present time, been so completely master of yourself, that my warning will very likely sound like presumption, especially as, though I am your elder, you have always led me, not I you."

"No, no," I cry, breaking in; "it is I who have looked up to you. The benefits have been all on my side; you have given all, and taken nothing—"

"Dick," he says abruptly, "there is only one unselfish aspect in my love for you—it is in sending you away, for the best part of my life goes with you."

Alas! that I should leave him to the influence that, stronger than mine, is to fill his life, as later one will arise over me, compared with which his is as nothing; that never again, all in all to each other, shall we two stand as we stand to-day. . . .

"What is this mighty business that you are trying to get off your mind?" I say, turning aside. "Are you afraid I'm not steady enough to take charge of the lad? Come yourself and take care of the pair of us!"

"I'm not thinking of him, but of you. Dick, have you ever noticed how a man, who has gone straight as a die, whether to hounds or through life, up to a certain point, all at once comes a fearful cropper, that he never gets over to the end of his days?"

"I have seen it," I say slowly, "but speaking of life—I

should not call it a fall—that implies something unexpected ; the man's whole life and training led up to the moment of the temptation, whatever it might be, and the result was perfectly easy and natural, long foreseen of himself, if not by others. Tell me," I add half jestingly, " what do you fear for me ? "

" That with all your fine, even splendid, chances of life, Dick, you'll make some crowning mistake in it—as I did," he adds, below his breath.

" And the cause of the mistake ? "

" A woman. Who else ? "

" Why, old fellow," I say, staring at him, " my heart has never beat the faster for a woman yet—I never think of one in any shape or form—"

" Dick," he says quietly ; " what women have you seen yet, save those of your own family—and Florizel ? "

" I have *seen* plenty—but as to coming under their influence—that's another matter. How is a woman to become so dangerous to me ? "

" Either through your loving her too much or too little."

" Some special woman, of course ? "

" No ; the special one is she whom you must marry. Widely different women would be equally fatal to you—a good woman even might make your misery as completely as a bad one."

" Then I vow I'll never fall in love at all," I say carelessly ; " warn me against avarice, bitterness of spirit, pride—but against woman ! It's a sheer waste of breath."

" Would you consider a man to be in the full possession of his faculties when one-half of them slept, Dick ? "

" If those that are awake suffice him for use, why should he desire the rest ? "

" That would be to exist, not live—and though hitherto yours has been the life of an ascetic, there will come a time when your passions, as yet a sealed book to you, will rise and

sweep all before them—and with the woman who calls them forth in all their gigantic strength will rest the happiness or the failure of your life—”

“Ullathorne,” I cry, startled; “what is this?—what has put such ideas into your head?”

“I don’t know,” he says, passing his hand across his forehead; “you had an instinct for me once—I seem to have the same for you now. I dread your falling under one of two influences abroad—either under Florizel’s, which will never satisfy you, being purely intellectual, or a new one, compared with which the former will be as child’s play, and which comes to most men once in a life-time—and I have a strong reason for dreading both.”

“And that is?”

“Because I see in the far-off future, happiness for you in a union in which your nature will be satisfied through and through—if nothing come between now and then to make it impossible.”

“My profession is my wife, Ullathorne, as Sieviking is my sweetheart.”

“Stay, Dick—a word more. There is one other way in which you may come to grief—through the very nobility and thoroughness of your nature.”

“Noble—thorough—” I cry, laughing bitterly; “how little after all these years you know me! Some days perhaps your character and mine may come to be tested by each other, and you will see how infinitely grander, finer—pshaw! we are bandying compliments, as though we were enemies. After all, you may be right, and I *shall* come to hopeless grief—but it will be no fall, friend, mind that.”

“Dick, do you ever look at yourself in the glass?”

“Once a day.”

“What do you see there?”

“A fool—as Seneca said when he looked in his.”

“I see something very different—that I never saw in

man's yet unless his life was to be out of the common way—not a look of doom, but a foreshadowing of something intense—whether of joy or sorrow God alone knows ! ”

“ I lost my careless look of youth and happiness when I lost Sieviking,” I say abruptly ; “ it changed my whole nature—*hardened* me. But Fate wreaked all her spite upon me in that one blow—nothing worse can ever befall me than that ; and already, thanks to you, I'm in a fair way of reversing it. Five thousand pounds—its glitter shines your words down, Ullathorne I can think of nothing else ; let me go and tell the girls.”

“ Stay,” cried Ullathorne ; “ it will come upon them as a shock—”

But, dazzled to the pitch of blindness by the golden certainties in my grasp, I go straight upstairs and into the room where Jill and Green Sleeves are sitting.

“ I have good news for you, girls,” I cry ; “ I am going away the day after to-morrow for four or five years ! ”

Ah, me ! what are we, even the best of us, that women should love and cling to us so ? My selfish joy smites me keenly as a two-edged sword when I see the pallor as of death that gathers on my two dear girls' faces.

“ *Dick !* ”

It is Jill who speaks—Green Sleeves is dumb, with that in her brown eyes which might bring tears to my own.

“ The years will soon pass,” I say, looking from one to the other, while Ullathorne, his back turned to us, stares out of window, “ and I shall come back quite rich, girls, well on the road to winning back Sieviking. You wouldn't have me throw away such a chance as that ? ”

The intensity of the moment has passed—we are able to talk, to discuss the future, to make all necessary plans, for the time is short, within three days I must be prepared to start.

But presently I discover that Green Sleeves has slipped away, and we see her no more to-day.

On the morrow all is business and hurry ; Ullathorne insists on remaining in town till I go, and does everything for me that a friend can. There are but two evenings before my departure, and strangely hushed and sweet, even solemn, are these evening hours when, in the old parlour, we four sit together, saying little, counting as a miser does his gold the hours that are left us to be with one another.

It is late when, on the last night, Ullathorne leaves us ; he will be here again betimes on the morrow to speed me on my way—a sharper pang than any that has assailed me yet pierces my heart, as in parting with him to-night I realize that for some years I shall be deprived of the companionship that for the past two years has formed so large a part of my life.

Pink May is absent in the country on a visit, having the boys with her. I have only my two dear girls to whom to bid good night as we part on the stairs as the clock strikes one.

The house seems quiet and full of ghosts to-night . . . I feel that I would give something to hear Anak's noisy footstep and jovial voice—hark ! what was that ?

Somewhere, far away,—it savours more of second sight than of actual hearing—I seem to hear the sound of weeping.

I must have slept, and wakened again, for there is a glimpse of daylight in the sky ; I open my door, and listen, but there is no sound abroad. Through Jill's door, ajar, I hear her even breathing, behind that of Charolais, fast shut, there is utter silence.

I dress myself, and go down stairs, convinced that imagination has led me astray ; but on the threshold of my den I pause, for within, I hear the sound of such passionate weeping as I never heard or dreamed of, from human lips before.

I softly push the door open, and the daylight that struggles in on the empty table, the cleared bookcases, all the cheerless signs of the impending desertion of a well-loved haunt, shows also a slight figure lying along the ground, with outstretched arms clasped fast about my chair.

O ! my God, how she weeps ! How the child must suffer, suffer always, with such a heart as this. . . I stoop, and, loosing her arms from about the chair, take her in my own, and seek to soothe her, as I never sought to soothe any other creature, having perhaps influence over, and love from, no one in such excess as this one poor child.

"Oh ! Mr. Dick, Mr. Dick," she cries, between the sobs that tear her slender body in pieces, it is not too late to change your mind now—don't go ! don't go !"

"But I shall come back, my little Green Sleeves, my heart," I say, smoothing the brown hair from her brow ; "have we not talked a hundred times of what we will do when I have won back Sieviking, and how many years of toil would it not take me to save up five thousand pounds ?"

"Something bad will come to you," she says, clinging to my hand ; something *here* tells me you are going away for evil, not good. If you come back, you will not be my Mr. Dick ever any more."

"Green Sleeves," I say gravely, "is not your grief selfish, less for me than for yourself ?"

"No," she says, weeping, still in that slow terrible way ; "if it were for your good I could bear it, but I know that it is not, and some day you will know it, too."

"Some day, Green Sleeves, when we are all happy at Sieviking, you will look back and laugh at these fears."

"That day will never come," she says, shivering, and turning paler than before ; "Mr. Dick, *don't go*."

"You will be grown up by the time I come back, Green Sleeves ; your hair will be fastened up, and—"

"You will not come back," she says, trembling ; "you will not come back *once* in all these years ?"

"Probably not. You will be over twenty, child ; quite old."

"I won't grow more than I can help," she says, a rueful little figure, half slipping off my knees, with my hand held fast

between both hers, and pressed against her breast ; so that I may still be your little girl—you'll never call any one Green Sleeves but me, will you, Mr. Dick ? ”

“ Never.”

“ I'll take care of the old room,” she says, with a heavy sigh ; “ and the pickles ”—she glances at a distant shelf that contains an odd assortment of bottles—“ I'm sorry I said I hated them so, and they're not so very nasty when you get used to them, and the boys shan't play tricks with the microscope, and—Mr. Dick ! ”

“ Yes ! ”

“ Will you see Lady Florizel abroad ? ”

“ Very likely.”

“ Then you and she will be married,” says Green Sleeves the tears running down her cheeks ; “ and she will *never* let me sit with you, or be your little girl again.”

“ Don't you like her, Green Sleeves ? ”

“ Yes,” says the child, after a moment's miserable reflection ; “ but she does not like *me*. I heard her say to you—that day she came down here, and I was sitting beside you as you worked—‘ Why is not that child at school ? ’ But you couldn't have got on without me, could you, Mr. Dick ? ”

“ No,” I answer, fondly smoothing the dark rings of hair from the childish face ; “ but I'm not going to be married to anybody, little one—I have only one love, and that's Sieviking.”

“ Mr. Dick, can you keep a secret ? ” This, after a few moments of anxious study of my face.

“ I'll try.”

“ And you'll promise not to laugh ? ”

“ I promise.”

“ Well, then, *I'm* going to do something to win back Sieviking, too. I'm going”—in a tone of triumph—“ to write a book.”

“ What about, Green Sleeves ? ”

“ Never you mind ; but I mean to get a lot of money for

it—all for Sieviking. It will help to pass the time till you come back," she goes on, wistfully ; "I shall sit in your very own chair, and sometimes shut my eyes hard, and make belief I am *you*."

The room is full of daylight now ; above stairs there is a stir of life ; hard by, Ariel goes to and fro. Each familiar sound strikes sadly on my ears. How many long years will pass before I hear them again ?

I draw Green Sleeves into my arms ; with a sigh, her head droops forward on my shoulder ; worn out by her lonely vigil, the child sleeps.

Breakfast is prepared, grows cold, but still she sleeps. Ullathorne is here ; the moment of departure has come, but she still sleeps on. I lay her down gently at last on the old sofa, and kiss her on the lips . . . would to God I could bring back to thee, my little one, that innocent kiss, the first, last pure one I gave thee !

O ! simple, happy home—never simple or unhaunted to me again—why did I leave you for lust of gold ?

"Ullathorne," I say hoarsely, as we drive away, Jill's anguished farewell over, "come and see them sometimes ; try to cheer them up a bit—I leave them in your hands."

A fatal charge—what madness impels me to it ?

"There is no danger now," he mutters below his breath ; then, aloud, "Ay, I will go, Dick—sometimes. Heavens ! how some day that child will—*love*."

Book III.

CHAPTER I.

"It was na in the ha,' the ha',
Nor in the painted bower,
But it was in the gude green wood
Amang the lily flower."

I LOOKED through the window, and there she was, swinging herself under the boughs of the old cherry-tree, and as she swung higher and higher, a shower of the white blossoms fell over her. A bird had perched himself on the wall hard by, and was singing as though he would burst his little throat with ecstasy, and he and she seemed to sing and move in rhythm, while her thoughts, like swallows, flew in and out of the sunbeams, and the song, and the falling shower of leaves.

The house behind me was dark and silent. Where were the voices that once rang so cheerfully through the gloom? The place seemed full of ghosts as I left the window, and approached the looking-glass that hung above the fireless hearth.

Among these ghosts was a tall, somewhat taciturn fellow, whom the rest called Dick; he had a clear boyish face, with some hope and belief in it, but I say to myself that he too is gone, as the depths of the mirror give back a bronzed, stern-visaged man, who has surely never erred on the side of hope or belief in anything living yet.

I had found the house door ajar, and entered, expecting to be greeted by a shout of familiar voices, but the birds alone

broke the stillness, as the swinger was the only sign of life. But now the swing is empty, and I hear her coming with a snatch of song upon her lips towards me.

“The bonniest lass in a’ Glasgow town
This day is awa’ wi’ a Hieland Laddie !”

she sings, as she enters the house with a step that keeps time with her voice.

I am sitting in the old chair, my back is to the light, and she cries out suddenly at sight of me, dashes forward a step or two, then back again, with disappointment in her brown eyes.

“I thought you were Mr. Dick,” she says, sitting down opposite me, just as slight a young thing for all her twenty years as when I parted from her so long ago, “but you’re not”—she wipes away a tear with one of the frills of her white gown—“so I suppose you must be *Will*.”

“Why not Kit?”

“I’ve seen *him*,” she says ruefully; “he came home and *stopped*, you know. He wore out the horsehair sofa, and Pink May’s patience, and—and everybody’s, and then he went away again. I think I shall like you better—for you’re more like Mr. Dick.”

“That’s not wonderful.”

“But I don’t think you’re so tall; would you mind standing up? I thought so—he is quite *half* a head taller than you are, and in face there is only a very faint resemblance. See, I have his portrait here,” and she draws from her neck a locket, and holds it out to me at the end of the long ribbon.

I take it from her hand; and was that my face once, Green Sleeves, and has it lain on your innocent heart all these years?

“He is quite as beautiful as that,” she says proudly, when I give it back to her. “When he looks at you, all mean

things seem to shrivel up ; but he is not stern to the people whom he loves."

"Child," I cry abruptly, "it is many years since you saw him ; he has probably altered. Very likely you would not know him again if he did come."

"Not know him !" she cries swiftly. "Is his a face that any one could forget ? But do you know that sometimes I begin to think he will *never* come back."

"Why should he not ?"

"We don't know, but we guess" (she turns her head aside) "that it is Lady Florizel who is detaining him. She cannot leave her father, who has been slowly dying for years—and so—so—Mr. Dick stays too."

"But he went for five years,"

"Yes, but at the end of four the lad's father died, and so he came home, and of course we thought *he* would come too. It is not *like* him," she adds, shaking her head sadly, "he so loves his profession ; he always worked so hard at it—to throw a whole six months away in this fashion."

"And why should it be Lady Florizel's doing ?"

"He is constantly with her, and he liked her before he went abroad, but she—*loved* him."

"It seems to me that he deserves no woman's love, child," I say bitterly.

"You are jealous," she says proudly, and with a smile like sunlight. "Why, *every one* loves and looks up to him. You should hear that lad talk about him—"

"You call him a lad ? He must be three-and-twenty."

"O ! he is quite young," she says, with immense dignity. "Then Ullathorne has never been the same man since Mr. Dick went away ; he comes here often, and we sit and talk about him by the hour."

I glance at her beauty ; is it a far-fetched simile to compare a young girl's face to a field of waving corn, with which flowers are blent, that sways and blooms and ruffles itself to every

breath and caprice of the morning breezes? But in the varying colour and mood of the face before me, noted by eyes that have grown to hate beauty for beauty's sake, I find that only which strikes my heart with a chill foreboding of coming evil.

"And Hetty?"

"Hetty is—Hetty. She is kind to me. I often see her."

"And Jill, God bless her?"

"She is just—happy."

For Jill is married, and by way of set-off against leaving the twins at home, Providence last year graciously bestowed upon her twins of her own.

"And Solomon and the Squiffer?"

"Earning forty pounds a year a-piece," she says proudly.

"They will be in directly—Mr. Will—"

"Yes?"

"I'm going to earn some money, too, for I've written a book. O! it was such hard work," she says, with a dismal shake of the head. "I cried over it often, but when I thought of Sieviking, and helping to buy it back again, I got on quite fast."

"And has Ullathorne read it?"

"Why should he?" she cries, with a sudden fear in her voice; then, as her eyes meet mine, she falters and turns aside. "No one will see it but—Mr. Dick."

Friend, friend, is it thus that thou hast rewarded me for the trust I had in thee? Not one moment too soon have I returned home, if indeed it be not already too late.

"Where is Pink May?" I say abruptly. "Perhaps she will have a word of welcome for one who has been absent so long."

"I beg your pardon," says Charolais, smitten with compunction; "you would be very welcome indeed, only that you see we are expecting somebody else. Are you hungry? Ariel may be some time yet, for she has got a sweetheart, and

they are always quarrelling, and when once they begin to quarrel she never thinks of the time. Is your luggage on the doorstep?"

"No."

"You needn't mind," she says, nodding, "Kit had none either; and when Anak came back from Natal, last year, he just brought—himself. But he had saved all his money; and you should only have seen the suit of clothes in which he gave Jill away!"

"And the sisters, did they come?"

"They were not asked; but they thought Jill made a mistake. He works for his bread, you know, and that is *low*. He is a barrister.

"I wonder if *she* would know Dick, if she saw him?"

"Know him? Why she loves him even better than Tom and the twins, I do believe. Mr. Will?"

"Well?"

"I want to ask you a question. Would you—would you, as a matter of taste, *admire* a young lady who was twenty-four years old, and had grey eyes and fair hair that *wouldn't* curl, especially if you happened to be fair yourself?"

"The plainer she was the better I should like her."

"O!" says Charolais, disappointedly; "then you would like this one very much, indeed, for she's *not* pretty. But she can talk," she adds, with a sigh; "she makes the time fly when you are with her, and that I suppose is why people find it so hard to get away from her and . . . do you know, it is very wicked—but sometimes I do wish the old Earl would *die*!"

"For what reason?"

"Because she would come home then, and Mr. Dick would come, too—she might let him come to see us sometimes, he would not be *dead* to us, as he is now."

"But he writes to you?"

"Hardly ever—and then only *scraps*. For the first three

years he wrote regularly—then a change came, and after that somehow we lost him.”

“And you don’t think he will come home again—to stay?”

“No,” she says, looking round, wistfully. “I have kept all in order for him, and his books—and pickles, and bones; but sometimes I sit in his old chair, and cry to think of how *he* will never work in it again—for when the Earl dies, of course he will marry—*her*.”

“And your book—of what use will it be then?”

“I never thought of that,” she says sadly, “till I had finished it. She is so rich, and she loves him; she is able to give him fifty Sievikings if she pleases. But, Mr. Will, do you think he will care for it that way as much as if he had *earned* it?”

“And you can think of him thus?” I say sternly.

“He loves her,” says Charolais, “and she loves him—the mere accident of her wealth is nothing. But I wish I could have helped him, if it was ever so little, to win it back. I can *never* do anything to repay him now for all his goodness to me.”

“Green Sleeves!”

“You must not call me that,” she cries quickly; “no one ever did, no one ever shall, but Mr. Dick.”

“Green Sleeves, come here.”

She trembles, then slowly, with her eyes full of fear and doubt, comes to my side and looks in my face.

Will the child’s eyes hit the blot—is my story indeed written in my eyes, that all who run may read?

“You have his features,” she says slowly, a dawning recognition in her own, “and—and—but no!” she cries, passionately, “you are not, you *cannot* be my Mr. Dick!”

“There—go,” I say harshly, “long as I have been absent, I had better not have returned at all, since there is no one, not even Green Sleeves, to give me a welcome.”

“I think, my dear,” says Pink May’s voice from the thresh-

old, in rather ruffled tones, "that if you receive gentlemen in my absence, it should be in the parlour, in spite of the green paper—so very unbecoming to a young girl's complexion."

"Aunt," I say, taking her up in my arms, and giving her a kiss, "don't *you* know me, either?"

"You're not Kit," she says, all of a flutter, as I set her down, "and perhaps—considering Anak and the bottled beer, you know—it's just as well. I think, dear boy, you must be Will."

"Here are the boys," I say; "let's see who *they* say I am."

"Charolais," they cry, rushing in, "we can take you a long, country walk to-night," stopping short, like young bulls in mad career, at sight of a stranger.

They have grown tall, broad-shouldered fellows, with open, honest countenances, not unlike Anak's, but without that invincible drollery that makes his face a very magnet to attract laughter.

"Well, who am I?"

"It's *Dick*!" cries the Squiffer, after a raking survey at the distance of half a yard from my nose; "welcome home, old fellow"—he seizes my hand and wrings it—"I know you by that mark on your forehead that you got when you tumbled over the wall into the pigsty; but that beard is a twister that your own mother mightn't get over."

"So it is," cries Solomon, gripping my other hand; "but I say, Dick, you've grown into a regular old fogey—hasn't he, Charolais?"

But Charolais has vanished.

"Dear boy," says Pink May, coming behind me, and kissing the tip of my nose, "I'm *rejoiced* to see you; and now we shall hear all about the Paris fashions."

"Solomon and I have saved up thirty pounds between us towards buying back Sieviking," says the Squiffer, triumphantly; "and we don't owe a penny in the world."

"And Anak has saved fifty," says Solomon.

"And I sixty, out of the housekeeping," says Pink May.

"And then, there's Charolais's book," says the Squiffer, proudly; "and Jill is saving, too; she wouldn't marry Tom till he promised she might save as much as she could towards helping us to buy Sieviking."

"And there is your five thousand pounds, dear," says Pink May, grandly.

"No," I say, "not so much as that—a thousand less; but it is yours, aunt, and was paid in to your account this morning."

"Dear boy," she cries, startled; "why did you do that? But, of course, it is all the same; it can stay there till you are able to add enough to it to buy the old place."

"I shall never buy it back," I say abruptly; "the money is only valuable to me now as giving me an opportunity of proving my gratitude to you, aunt."

"Never buy back Sieviking!" ejaculates the Squiffer, all the brightness dashed from his young face; "and we have worked so hard, we have denied ourselves in everything to be able to feel that we were helping, if only to buy back a square yard of the dear old house—"

"There are too few of us," I say calmly, but touched to the heart, nevertheless; "Jill is gone, Anak is away; if we went back, it would never be the same."

"But it was something to look forward to, to work *for*," they cry, in a breath, looking at me with a dull estrangement that is one of the hardest thrusts I have experienced in this inhospitable home country.

"Perhaps Lady Florizel does not like the country," says Pink May, hoping to throw oil on the troubled waters.

"There's no Lady Florizel that ever stepped who's worth losing Sieviking for," they say as they go heavily away; and, in my heart, I echo, "No, not one."

CHAPTER II.

"O ! weel sall ye my true love ken,
Sae sune as ye her see,
For o' a' the flowers o' fair England,
The fairest flower is she."

"Now, that your beard is off," says Pink May, "it seems incredible that we should not have known you at first ; for, except that you look older, you are exactly the same as when you went away."

"You are altered," says Jill, wistfully, as she strokes my hair with the old motherly touch. "I miss something in your face, dear, though I don't know what it is."

"You are improved," says Bell, critically. "You have lost that air of being so intensely in earnest over everything, that used to make people feel uncomfortable. Florizel has certainly given you *polish*."

"It is a pity you could not have brought her back with you," says Hetty, "after waiting a whole year, too ; it was most provoking !"

"Really, the old man is an unconscionable time in dying," says Cynthia in her soft gutturals ; "he wants Sairy Gamp by to send him off like a lamb. But I do think it was very unwise of Dick not to wait a little longer ; for who knows but that, left to herself over there, she may fall in love with some body else ?"

"You have a high opinion of Florizel—and me," I say drily ; "but to relieve your minds of any further anxiety on the point, I may tell you that we have not the remotest idea of getting married."

"You are not engaged ?" screams Bell.

"You have quarrelled ?" cries Hetty.

"Neither the one nor the other—we are better friends than ever."

"Some of your high-flown notions about not living on your

wife's money, I suppose," says Bell, indignantly. "And so she is to wait, forsooth, till you have satisfied your ridiculous pride by earning a paltry competence. It's simply disgraceful, considering that she has wasted five of the best years of her life on you already!"

"Who told you that we had any thoughts of one another?" I say, facing round on them all. "You made up your minds that it was *to be*, and there was an end of it all, without the slightest reference to the persons most concerned in the business."

"And pray," says Bell, trying, but failing to sit erect in the luxurious couch in which she is sunk, "will you deny that you flirted with her the whole of the season before she went abroad—that you never looked at, or spoke to another woman but her?"

"Flirted?" I say contemptuously. "No—I leave that to women; I never *flirted* with Florizel. She was the only woman I ever met in society with whom I cared to exchange two words—and I like her even better now than I did then."

"A little aversion to begin with would be better than this deadly *liking*," says Bell, with a groan. "However, I wash my hands of you—it's no use to *try* and help the boys of the family—we ought all to have been *girls*."

"Poor Florizel!" says Hetty, "I don't think liking will content *her*—she was *difficile* to a fault till she knew Dick—and then—"

"Ullathorne!"

He was away when I returned—this is our first meeting, but, as we grip hands, the words of welcome on either lips die unspoken.

If I have changed, so has he. Haggard, worn, with burning eyes whence a fever of restless longing seems to look, he has aged by fifteen years since we bade each other farewell, and his looking-glass should cause any changes he may find in me to appear but faint and shadowy indeed.

And yet, when we are alone, when he puts his hands on my

shoulders, and looks me in the face, I know that he reads my soul as clearly as though no shadow lay on his own.

He casts himself down by the table, groaning ; and, covering his face with his hands, cries, " O ! God, why did I send him away ? "

Why, indeed, but that Fate ever sends us eagerly to our undoing. . . . I know now how true the instinct was that made Green Sleeves cry, " Don't go ! don't go ! " how needed were the words of warning spoken by Ullathorne at parting.

" Dick," he says, lifting his haggard face, " I'd give half my fortune not to have persuaded you to go with that lad ; it has meant shipwreck, or I'm much mistaken, to more lives than one ! "

" To more than one ? " I cry hoarsely, my heart turning cold with a terrible fear. " Ullathorne, you cannot, you dare not, mean to—*her* ? "

" Why did you leave her in my care ? " he cries, pacing the room with wild and hurried steps ; " that was the most fatal, the most miserable part of the whole business ! Away from her, I might have mastered my passion ; but to see her often, to be compelled to for ever contrast her with one whom I have sworn to love and honour, it has driven me mad, it is killing me by inches ; and now that you have returned to see my degradation, it will be *hell*."

" Is it you who are speaking ? " I say, cold as if life itself had left me ; " *you* ! "

" Ay ! " he cries recklessly ; " trample on and despise me ; cast me out from the place I once held in your heart, and that now I am not worthy to fill ; pour out upon me your heaviest wrath and hatred, but never can you speak one-half the awful condemnation of my own soul ! "

" You can rave of your own black, guilty soul," I cry, with a strong shudder as of intense cold ; " of condemnation—damnation were a better word—but what of her's ? O ! God help me to forget that ever you and I have been as brothers—and more than brothers ! " I say between my teeth ; " if I have

fallen, thank God I have not fallen to this—the last, foulest breach of trust the heart of *friend* ever conceived.”

“Sieviking,” he cries, starting up, “these words, and to me? Guilty, erring, I have been, but do I deserve *this*?”

“Ay! and worse,” I cry, swept away by a whirlwind of fiercest scorn and loathing; “can you, who shrink not from the deed, bear to hear it called by its right name—*dishonour*?”

“Dishonour!” For one moment a fire flashes in his eye equal to mine; he dashes forward, his hand clenched as mine in that dead heat of passion in which life is valued at less than a shrivelled leaf, then his hands, unlocking, fall at his sides; the sweat of agony gathers on his brow; below his breath, as he turns aside, I hear him whisper, “for her.” . . .

“Man, man,” I cry, “what devil tempted you to this deed? And was it *this* that I have loved all these years?”

“My promise to you,” he says, lifting his head, “I have kept to the letter—at what a cost you will never know. My dishonour concerns myself alone.”

“There may be a dishonour done to a woman’s soul,” I say sternly, “heinous as the destruction of the body, and when that inner sanctuary be won, what matter though the shrine itself be spared? It is not enough that you have never spoken to her of love, if you have been the means of bringing love to her heart.”

He turns suddenly, a light overspreading his worn face—a light that some day I shall understand, but not now.

“For the sake of the past years of friendship,” he says vehemently, “answer me this one question. Do you, for all that your face tells me, return home—*free*?”

Silence—that grows deeper and deeper, then, “God help us all!” he says, below his breath; and there is silence again, and twilight gathers and falls, settling down in darkness upon one heart, at least, in which love is dying, dying hard, stubbornly fighting every inch of the way . . . one, at least, that is living over again the past years of friendship, counting, with a miser’s

lingering touch, its golden store. . . . O! friend, who comest to a man but once in his lifetime, while of women in the world there are many, I have no power to thrust thee forth . . . to Death alone is given that power, when he shall break the casket that contains thee.

"And so we have loved one another, and been wise each for the other, and this is the end."

Is it Ullathorne's voice that speaks?

"Friend, some day you will know me better . . . some day you will know that, untrue as I have been to myself—to her, and to you, I have been faithful always; and against my memory you will wipe out the word—dishonour."

A hand rests for a moment lightly upon my bowed head, when presently I lift it, I am alone.

CHAPTER III.

"Gin I had wist, or had kist
That love had been sae hard to win,
I had lock'd my heart wi' a key of gowd,
And pinn'd it with a silver pin."

THE swing is always empty, no snatches of song break the drowsy quiet of the house. Years ago I used to complain that I could not work for the tumult around me—now the very silence itself seems to come between my books and me.

The boys are never at home these long summer evenings; they are at their cricket, or escorting Charolais for a walk. Pink May sits with her books or knitting under the cherry-tree by the garden wall, Ariel conducts her evening quarrel out of earshot—and Green Sleeves, where is she?

Sometimes with Hetty, sometimes, as I have said, out with the boys, oftener still at home—in any case, she is alike invisible to me.

My work takes me abroad during the day, but at my evening meal no Green Sleeves presides, though I know that she

has "passed by there" by the fresh bunch of now wild, now garden, flowers, that never fails to stand beside my plate.

How different to the welcome home that I expected ; how changed from the time when the two girls snatched at every opportunity to sit beside me, and I was king of the little commonwealth in which for subjects I now reckon but one !

Pink May, God bless her ! is my willing slave ; her garrulous talk flows on like a sea, forming a mere background to my thoughts ; but now and again a word or two go farther than my ears—they reach my brain. Something ails Charolais, she says ; she is never noisy now, the house used to be full of her ; but now you would not know she was in it.

The boys eye me resentfully, in some indefinite way they believe me to be at the bottom of the change in their adored playmate, but I know better.

She could laugh and swing, she could be happy, so long as the object of her unconscious love was by her, but when he went away, the sharp, sudden pain of his going woke her to a knowledge of her own heart ; and now, in her shame and her love alike, she suffers.

I believe Ullathorne spoke truth when he swore that he had *spoken* no word of love ; but when on the rare occasions of my seeing the child, I mark the change in her—the averted glance, the down-bent head, the pallor where the rosy hue of health used to glow, I curse within my breast the man who has blighted her.

Once, in the dead of night, I hear her weeping. "Poor Green Sleeves, poor little heart," I say to myself, as I listen, "~~your~~ sorrows have begun early !"

And yet I cannot but despise her ; ignorant of evil as she is, these should surely be within her some instinct of purity to guard her against nourishing, however unconsciously, this love for Ullathorne, the married man, and loyalty to Hetty alone prevent her thinking of him other than as a friend.

Does she shun me, knowing that I possess her secret ? or is it that the shock of finding me so different to what she had

persuaded herself I was to be, has caused a complete revulsion of the old childish affection she bore me?

If her instinct has not guided her aright with Ullathorne, it has done so with me—she said truly that I was not Mr. Dick—*he* is dead, and with him all the old hopes, the old ambitions. Sieviking even is no longer the object of my ambition; were it given back to me to-morrow it would not cause me one throb of pleasure.

To work, for work's sake, taking no thought for that dull, dead to-morrow, which my life must henceforth be—this is the end to which the high ambitions of the youth who

“Left his home with a bounding heart,
For the world was all before him,”

have come.

Well may the poem with which these lines begin, be termed an epicedium!

The boys are at their cricket to-night; Pink May, too, is absent, and the heat and stillness seem to suffocate me as I go to the window and look out on the burnt patch of grass that we call our garden. As I so stand, some fragments of paper come fluttering down from an upper window, and fall on the ground without.

There let them lie—they may contain a secret; but in one way I profit by them, for they give me a clue to Green Sleeves' whereabouts.

She is rarely downstairs; I have once or twice wondered where she hides herself. I fling my cigar away, with the sudden resolve to go and find out. It is a small house, but it has unexpected nooks and corners. As I ascend the stairs, I remember having long ago seen one tiny room at the top of them, that would at a pinch hold two people, one writing-table, and a chair.

It lies back a little way, and might easily be overlooked, but as I pause outside it I distinctly hear the scratch, scratch of a pen as it travels over the paper.

I am literally shod in the shoes of silence, otherwise in

slippers of Green Sleeves' own working, so I am able to approach the door unheard, and even, for it stands ajar, to look in.

At a deal table, drawn close to the window and scattered over by papers, with a prodigious smudge of ink on her nose, and another on the forefinger that anxiously travels down the page of Johnson's dictionary open before her, sits my Lady Green Sleeves, compelling from me the first smile that has crossed my lips since I returned home.

How serious, how absorbed ! The world surely is hanging on the fate of the word for which she is searching, and this is the first book that was written since the world began.

She closes the volume with a solemn shake of the head, resumes her pen with a business-like air, and begins to write as though she meant to go on for ever.

But all at once she lays down the pen, and thrusting her little ink-stained fingers through the dark hair ruffled into a hundred dusky rings, "It's very hard work," she says, sighing.

"Let me help you, Green Sleeves," I say, pushing open the door, and repent of my abruptness, when, with a cry, she spreads out her arms over the papers, as if to hide them, and turns pale as death.

"Green Sleeves, may I come in ?"

"It is all yours," she says, still keeping that jealous guard over her papers ; "and this room is yours, and, and—you will come in if you please."

I turn on my heel without a word, and leave her.

But I have not gone half-a-dozen steps when the patter of feet comes after mine, and a fresh voice cries anxiously,—

"Mr. Dick, I *didn't* mean it !"

Going straight to my den, I am soon absorbed in my work ; it is with a start of surprise, therefore, that I presently feel a touch on my arm, and, looking up, see Charolais standing beside me. I finish the chapter, shut the book, and wait for her to begin.

"I *didn't* mean it, Mr. Dick !" she says desperately.

"Then why did you say it ?"

She does not answer, only falls to stripping the whorls from the stalk of the water gilly-flower stuck in her belt.

"People who stay away as long as I did, should never come back at all; others fill their places, and they are forgotten."

"No," she says, in a low voice; "it is because they are *remembered* so keenly, that after a long absence their faces seem strange to their friends."

"Am I so very much altered?" I say involuntarily.

"You look," she says, lifting her eyes to mine, "as if you could never try *hard* for anything again. You used to have a bright, forward out-look, as if you saw something beautiful shining at the end of a long road, and were pressing towards it heart and soul—*now* you seem to see nothing but the present."

"Perhaps the change is not in me only, child; others may have changed also."

The guilty colour leaps into her cheek; she starts aside, as a wild animal may who spies the hunter approaching. My heart sinks as I mark these signs of fear—suddenly, I resolve to test her.

"Charolais, do you miss Ullathorne?"

"Miss him?" she cries passionately; "every day I miss him more, every day I *value* him more; until he went away I never knew what he was to me. Tell me," she cries, with tears in her eyes, "*why did he go?*"

As her eyes meet mine, I could swear, but for her blushes awhile ago, that she does not love him, or that if it be so, she is entirely unconscious of that love. Not thus boldly does a woman utter her inmost heart; silence is its finest eloquence, as a stammer is its truest expression.

"They say he went for his health," she goes on; "but he has looked as ill as that for *years*. Even Hetty noticed it long ago. I've got a notion—don't be angry, Mr. Dick!—that his going away had something to do with *you?*"

"Why do you think that?" I say, in measured tones,

"Because, after seeing you once, only *once*, he went away; and for how many years had he not been looking for your return! In this very room, for what long hours have we not sat and talked of you (for a moment she turns aside, and the blushes come thick in her face), of what we would do, of your career in life, and the name you would some day make; and now he is *gone*, and Hetty even does not know when he will come back."

A light breaks in on me.

"So that is why you are angry with me?" I say sternly; "because you think I sent him?"

"If you did," she cries passionately, "you sent away the truest, best friend a man ever had." She faces me defiantly. How early love teaches defiance! My heart hardens against her as I look.

"And do you know of no reason why I should bid him go?"

It is one of those moments when truth is forced out of us, when we use speech to convey our thoughts, not to hide them. A flash of truth like this is electric. Involuntarily she exclaims, "He has"—then stops short, but I can complete the sentence—"told you?"

For a moment I look at her as she stands, her cheeks dyed with guilty blushes; yet in her eyes the shining of such a great love as beats down the shame and makes her just as pure and gladsome a thing as if that love were to her a crown of honour; then I turn aside, struck to the very soul. Here is indeed proof—

"Strong as Holy Writ,"

and if am not much mistaken, here also is no girl's fancy, lightly made and lightly broken, but such a love as time and absence will never break.

"And so this is why you have avoided me, Charolais," I say wearily—surely there can be no pretence of secrets between us two now—"because I sent him away?"

"No," she says, turning her head aside; "it was not that,

but I was *ashamed* to look you in the face. . . . I could not get over it. . . . I never *shall* get over it"—she pauses, and covers her face with her hands. "To make such a dreadful mistake, to talk to you about *her* in that manner, to ask you if you *admired* the person you were going to be married to!"

"Charolais," I say sternly; "this is disingenuous; have you been avoiding me for no other reason than this insignificant one?"

"It was a dreadful thing to say—that she had hair that *wouldn't* curl; but perhaps it might—with tongs."

I look at her sharply; her face is as grave as a judge, but the corners of her mouth are not quite steady.

"Green Sleeves," I cry, "you are a little spiteful, saucy, incomprehensible minx, and—"

"O! call me that again!" she cries joyfully; "call me your Green Sleeves, your little Green Sleeves, that used to sit by your side and help you with the pickles. I'm *not* grown very much after all, am I?"

"No, but you're not the Green Sleeves I left behind. For one thing, you have grown pretty, and I hate beauty—down-right wholesome ugliness is far more to my taste."

"Ah! that is why you are so fond of Lady Florizel?"

"Now you are rude, as well as spiteful."

"I daresay I can make myself ugly, too," she says, nodding; "it's *much* more natural to most people to be ugly than pretty. Now, I like folks to be good-looking; it was a dreadful shock to me to find you so altered for the worse. Doesn't *she* see a great difference in you?"

"I never asked her."

"Perhaps it's her doing," hazards Green Sleeves, innocently; "if so, of course, she wouldn't notice it."

"No, you are not Green Sleeves," I say, looking at her; "the little girl I used to call by that name was neither malicious nor evil speaking—"

"She should not make you unhappy then," says the child, hanging her head.

"How do you know she does so?"

"No one else could. But perhaps it's only when you're away from her that you look like that?"

"Then I'm likely to look so for a long while."

"But she'll come back some day, Mr. Dick," she says gently.

"Not to me."

She looks at me for a moment; then the tears come into her eyes—

"O! Mr. Dick, Mr. Dick!" she cries, laying her little hand on mine, "forgive me, do forgive me—but I didn't know,"

"You have done no harm, child—my heart is not broken. But I shall never marry."

She looks at me sorrowfully, but by degrees a ripple of joy, beginning at her lips, spreads upwards to her brown eyes, till her face is a bit of pure sunshine.

"What good times we will have, you and I together," she says, with a beaming smile, "just as if we had never grown up at all, but stopped young as we used to be! But you're *quite* sure your heart's not broken—because I wouldn't for the world be happy at your expense?"

"Quite sure. I've only lost every illusion that makes life worth having."

CHAPTER IV.

"She brighten'd like the lily flower,
Till her colour pale was gone,
With rosy cheek and ruby lip
She smiled her love upon."

"SIVA in love with *Green Sleeves*!"

"He went down on his knees to her in this very room, and begged her to marry him—such an extraordinary thing—two proposals in a room with a green paper; so very unbecoming to a young girl's complexion, you know!"

"And what did she say?"

"Told him to get up again, or she would box his ears soundly."

"*That* was very unbecoming too."

"Charolais can be very decided when she pleases," says Pink May, nodding, "and she forbade my telling a soul, and I haven't—particularly you, whom I have—. Here she comes."

"It is good to be merry and wise,
It is good to be honest and true,
It is well to be on with the old love
Before you are *off* with the new!"

are the sentiments with which Green Sleeves heralds her advent.

She is beginning to pick up her spirits again. Like all young things, she finds it harder to be miserable than to be happy.

"You here!" she exclaims, stopping short on the parlour threshold at seeing me sitting within. "How early you have done work to-day!"

"That's a pretty song, Green Sleeves, you were singing," I say, as she sits down, her lap full of spoils gathered from that Lady Freyja after whom, in Northern Europe, all flower and insect life is named.

"It is quite my own idea," she says, picking up a stalk of Canterbury bells, and shaking them close to her ear, as though she expected to hear a chime ring out.

"Suggested by experience, Green Sleeves?"

"I hunted for this yellow sun-rose everywhere," she says, looking down at her flowers, "and this blood-flower; but though I found them at last, *nowhere* could I find a star of Bethlehem."

My eyes, fixed on the flowers in the child's lap, do not see them; they travel past and beyond to Sieviking, that for above a year I have not once visited. For who will deny that in the spirit only are some of our sweetest, saddest journeys made? and surely, though no human eye or ear knows of our presence, the well-loved haunts, the familiar ways are conscious of our step as it passes by? They are real pilgrimages to us, just as

the dead, the lost, the estranged, come to us in our sleep, and as we press kisses on their flesh and blood-warm faces, feel the grip of their hands, hear the ring of their "God keep you!" and, awakening, know it to be a dream, then the awakening seems the dream, as the dream for many a day seems the reality.

"Our passions," says Confucius, "shut up the doors of our souls against God," and if the Maker, then against His works also. That scorching breath dims the freshness and beauty of all upon which we look, and Sieviking itself recedes from me as I would approach it.

I no longer think of it with longing; I would not accept it now as a free gift. I even hate to think that I once so passionately desired it; hate to be reminded of those lofty ideals of my youth that now lie shattered as common clay at my feet.

"So Siva is back again, Green Sleeves?"

"Yes."

She looks quickly at Pink May, innocently sunk in her knitting, then at me, and colours brilliantly. Confound those complexions that give back every shade of emotion, and are very will-o'-the-wisps to mislead one. Am I again being made the fool of a blush when it occurs to me that it is *Siva* after whom Green Sleeves has been fretting, not Ullathorne?

"How long has he been away?"

"Let me see," says Pink May; "I was unpicking my old red silk, when he came bursting in—to say 'How d'ye do?' you know (catching Green Sleeves' eye), and I had it re-dipped in March; it must have been February when he went."

"He will be improved," says Green Sleeves, picking up a cloudberry from her lap, "for he will be five months older."

"You are in a great hurry to grow old, child."

"I like boys to *be* boys," she says gravely. "Now Anak and the twins are bricks, but Lord Siva wants to be grown up, and—"

"He is nearly as old as Ullathorne was when he married Hetty," I say drily. "But how came he here?"

"We met him at Hetty's," says Pink May, "and there he asked if he might come and have a chat with us about *you*; so he took our address, and wrote it down before everybody."

"I thought Bell and Cynthia would have had a fit," says Green Sleeves, breaking into a peal of laughter; "I believe they prayed he might *die* before that visit ever came off!"

"And did he faint on the doorstep?" I say, laughing.

"Anak happened to be sitting on it, in his shirt sleeves, with a jug of beer beside him (it was a very hot day), so he asked Lord Siva to have some, and they were having a very good time indeed when we came down stairs."

"It was very unfortunate that Anak should have been at home just then, and *on* the doorstep," says Pink May, "but luckily I had got a most becoming cap on, and Charolais was quite neat, so it might have been worse."

"We talked about you," says Green Sleeves, "till our breath was gone, and then—he went."

"But he came back," says Pink May, nodding.

"He told us of all your doings abroad," says Green Sleeves, clasping her hands about her knees, and looking at me thoughtfully, "of how, wherever you went, *you* were always taken for him—"

"And called by every one the English 'milord,'" interpolates Pink May, "while all the ladies, without exception, were in love with you!"

"Thinking I was Lord Siva," I say drily; "that would have been a compliment indeed if it had been true, which it was not."

"He told us a story," says Pink May, putting her hand to her head, "of some adventure you both had in Paris. I can't recollect it, but I know there was a lady in it. Can you recollect what it was, Charolais?"

"No," she says, intent on her flowers; "it was just like the

other stories—somebody took a fancy to Mr. Dick, thinking he was Lord Siva ! ”

She looks up earnestly enough, but our eyes meet, and are held fast to each other. And now, if I possess Green Sleeves’ secret, she also possesses mine.

CHAPTER V.

“ The white o’ my love’s skin is white
As down o’ dove or maw ;
The red o’ my love’s cheek is red
As blood that’s spilt on snaw.”

“ *CAN* he mean anything ? ”

“ What luck if he does ! ”

“ There is something in the very name that tempts matrimony. He thought at first she was Miss Sieviking, and the thing was done ! ”

Thus Bell and Hetty, as Green Sleeves and Siva, the first couple, delicately take the floor before them.

Though she is twenty this is her first ball, and Bell’s last for the season, for July is in, and soon the floodgates of fashion will be out.

“ Just in time, too. I’ve been quite in a fright about Dick. You see she’s so very pretty—”

“ And they are always together.”

“ And Florizel is away—”

“ It would be Madness ! ”

“ Ruin ! ”

“ Sin ! ”

“ A waltz would be preferable,” I say, advancing and seizing Hetty round the waist—a very pretty waist yet, if not so slim as it used to be, and taking her the length of the room before she has recovered her breath.

“ What news have you of Ullathorne ? ” I say, as we pause by an open window.

"I wonder you dare to ask me," cries Hetty indignantly; "I don't know what passed between you at our house that afternoon, but as to his rushing off next day on the score of illness, it was ridiculous—he had looked like that for ages."

"I shouldn't wonder if you have him back again before very long," I say, looking at Siva and Green Sleeves. And, indeed, with these two happy, handsome young people mated, what is there to prevent his coming home again, and my again possessing the friend that, in spite of all, I love better than any other living creature upon earth?

"I don't know how you manage to get and *keep* such an influence over people," she says, looking at me with half-angry, half-admiring eyes. "Ullathorne can't do it; I should be made to behave myself, I suppose, if he could."

"He is too good for you," I say warmly; "you would have made a capital wife to a man who would beat and lock you up once a week, if you didn't please him."

"I think I should have liked that," says Hetty, meditatively, as she looks down on the exquisite arms that lie in her lap; "it must be because you are always so violent that I stand in such wholesome fear of you. I should not wonder if your wife were a very happy woman, even if she were black and blue occasionally."

"My wife!"

The room grows dark before me; I tear the glove I am holding between my hands into ribands, and then wonder who has done it, as I look down on the fragments at my feet.

"They make a pretty pair," says Hetty, her eyes fixed on two of the dancers, "and you can see that he really is head over ears in love with her. It is quite a stroke of luck; for, of course, he might marry almost anybody that he pleased—it is lucky his father is not living!"

A man might be prepared to overlook a good deal who saw Green Sleeves, as she comes sweeping past in Siva's arms, her

feet going "as pat to the music as its echo," her brown eyes brilliant with joy, with cheeks warm as roses that grow on a wall

"The side that's next the sun,"

lips parted in a little vehement pant for breath, and a white breast that heaves passionate response to the music.

Siva is no bad specimen of his class. Tall, clean-limbed, ruddy, with that general air of soap and water peculiar to the Englishman, his body is a good reflection of the mind within, and a woman might love and marry, and be happy with him to her life's end.

A woman—but Green Sleeves?

Hetty has flitted off. I am left alone, and able to watch this young couple at my ease.

They look very happy, very well pleased with each other; a superficial observer might decide them to be perfectly consented lovers, but I know better.

For the present, one of the two at least is enjoying herself, as a dancer, pure and simple. Two young, healthy people who abominate one another, may, as long as their step suits, and until the music ceases, be entirely happy together.

She comes to a sudden stop opposite me, by-and-by, her white dress blown out behind her like a cloud; her little, eager feet, checked in mid-career, looking like snow flakes newly lit on the black-polished floor, and, sitting down by my side, gives vent to a deep sigh of delight.

"O! Mr. Dick," she says, "it would be just perfection if only *he* were here!"

Green Sleeves and I have almost fallen back into the old familiar ways. There are times when I forget that she has grown older, and she seems just the child that I left so unwillingly five years ago, but now and again my heart is bitter towards her in that she has lost to me my friend.

Usually she avoids speaking of him, though I know well

enough when he is in her thoughts ; but to-night her happiness has beaten tact out of the field ; and indeed the proprieties usually come off badly at the hands of the emotions.

I look at her sternly, but she is not noticing or thinking of me ; her eyes.

“ In the midst of their own brightness,
In the very fane of lightness,
Over which their eyebrows leaning,
Picture out each lovely meaning,”

are far away, and Siva's hand, tugging restlessly at his moustache, betrays that he also has overheard her speech, and is aware of her abstraction.

“ Charolais,” says Bell, coming up, “ allow me to introduce to you ——” and a purblind, little old man, who has been ogling her from opposite for the past minute or two, having expressed a desire to totter through the Lancers by her aid, writes her name down ; and, with a friskiness quite involuntary, departs.

“ He has fallen in love with you,” says Bell, laughing ; “ don't turn his brain if you can help it !”

“ Has he a brain ?” says Green Sleeves, looking after him.

“ Come with me,” says Bell, “ I want to show you something,” which means that she is going to cross-question her about Siva, and strenuously warn her to beware lest he slip through her fingers.

They go away together, Green Sleeves nodding to Siva, who shows his jealousy, poor fellow, as though it were something to be proud of ; some day he will be more ready to own to a crime than to such a sin against the social code.

“ Sieviking,” he says abruptly, when they are gone, “ who is this *he* ?”

“ You should know better than I ; you have seen her constantly during the last year.”

“ I had my suspicions at one time,” he says, looking at me, “ but she was wishing him *here* ; so I must have been wrong. Who can it be ?” he goes on, restlessly. “ She doesn't *know* any one, for she never went to your sisters except when they

were alone, and nobody visited her at home but Ullathorne and myself."

I study his face keenly; clearly he has no suspicion of the truth . . . but love is blind.

"Sieviking," he says abruptly, "you know all about that affair five years ago; how infatuated and determined I was; how nothing but sending me out of England with *you* saved me from committing moral and social suicide."

"Yes, yes," I say impatiently;—for have not other men who had no friends by to save them 'since made shipwreck of *their* lives through ill-placed love, however nobly conceived? I think more men are ruined through their good impulses than their bad ones.

"And you will think," he goes on, "that as I got over that, so I should get over this, if she refuses to have me. But now all is different—love and honour go together, and she has grown into my very heart, and is ten thousand times more to me to-night than the day when, like a blundering idiot, I rushed at and asked her to marry me, as though she could find me as easy to love, as I had found her."

"And she said?"

"No—a hundred times, no—and it was then that I got a suspicion she liked a certain person, but I know now that I was mistaken."

"Poor Anak!" I say, half aloud; "to think of his falling in love with her, too. What *is* there in the little witch to account for it?"

"She is *herself*," says Siva, almost indignantly; "I never saw any one a bit like her, and never expect to again. She is so sweet, and saucy, and lovely—"

"There, there," I say impatiently, for these lovers' transports are not agreeable to me, and it has certainly never occurred to me till now that Green Sleeves could be "lovely."

I look at her as she advances to meet her old partner in the Lancers, and discover that Siva is right; she *is* lovely.

Lovely, with the sweetness of a violet, the purity of a lily, the grace and tenderness of a child that one cannot look on without feeling the heart grow warmer and better for the joy it affords to us.

"You have great influence with her, Sieviking," says Siva ; "won't you use it in my favour ? It seems an unmanly sort of thing to ask ; but my heart is so set on her, that I feel I'd rather get her for my wife *unwillingly* than any other woman I ever knew with her whole heart."

"Would you ? I don't think I could go so far as that. But I'll use any influence I may have with her on your behalf."

"You will !" cries the young fellow, "and at once ? She seems better inclined towards me to-night than she has ever been before."

"Then make her better still," I say drily, as Green Sleeves herself approaches ; "and I will do my best for you to-morrow."

CHAPTER VI.

"Or does the wind blow in your glove ?
Bowling down, bowling down ;
Or runs your mind on another love ?
And aye the birks are bowling."

WE left the ball at one, and for the remaining hour or so of night I have lain restlessly tossing to and fro on my bed, with the light wind that has got up without for company. Stirring the topmost boughs of the cherry-tree opposite my window, it sends across my coverlid (for the moon is high) wandering shapes and indistinct outlines of flickering leaves, with now and then a leap, a tongue, a quiver of light between.

As the fantastic dance ceased, and daylight, first faint, then strong and lusty as a young god, grew and filled the heavens with his power, I rose, and, dressing myself, passed noiselessly

downward through the quiet breathings of the sleeping household.

But as I passed the door of Green Sleeves' study, that once forbidden me is now always open to me, obeying some odd impulse, I pushed the door open, and went in.

She must have been here not long since ; there are signs of her recent presence in the white kid glove thrown down on the table, in the crimson rose placed in water that last night she wore at her breast, in—but what is this ?

A broad sheet of paper lies before me, its whiteness all disfigured by splashes, and stars, and odd blurred shapes . . . tears ?

She must have been here but a very little while ago, for the page is wet. . . . O ! Green Sleeves, what a tear was there ! This one fell delicately, hope or memory touched thee, and thy heart slackened, then came a blinding rush that merged a hundred drops in one, and here I think thy head sunk down, and left this confused outline . . . It is a map traced by thy heart's agonies, and yet thou must have wept very silently, else, for I was waking, I must have heard thee.

The child's hurt is more incurable than I had thought . . . to come straight from the scene in which she had taken such delight, to weep alone for him thus ; with every pulse set to the bounding joy and exhilaration of the moment, to turn aside, to *remember* ! O ! faithful heart . . . wretched as thou art, Ullathorne, one well might envy thee.

How can I talk to her of Siva with this pitiful revelation of her inmost soul in my mind ?

And even could I summon the courage, or by harshness persuade her, might I not be doing that which at some future day I should wish to Heaven I could undo ?

Through the half-open drawer of the table, something in Green Sleeves' handwriting catches my eye. Before I am well conscious of the dishonour of the action, the drawer is open,

and the manuscript of the child's novel is revealed ; a second more, and it is in my hand.

It was only yesterday that I said to her, "Green Sleeves, I think I should like to read that novel of yours."

"It wants such a lot of alteration," she said, turning her head away, "and—and it's dreadful stuff, Mr. Dick, you would only laugh at it."

"I won't laugh—promise me that I shall read it some day."

"Yes—some day," she said. "Mr. Dick?"

"Yes?"

"It's all *guessing*, you know."

"Of course." But I thought her disingenuous in this, as assuredly she had not dreamed only of love, but knew it.

And now the "Some day" has come, I hold the expression of her inmost soul in my hand ; shall I surprise and make my own all the secret of this poor little heart?

I turn to the last page, and there, at the foot of the word *Finis*, a big tear lies, as though it were a seal affixed to a portion of her life over and done with . . . can she have been all night striving to uproot her sinful love, and so make room for the new healthy one just trembling into life? If it be so, then God help thee in thy struggle, Green Sleeves, and bring thee safe to land at last!

"There is a sound of footsteps without, the door is pushed gently open ; looking up, I see her standing in the doorway, pale, heavy-eyed, how different to the happy creature, who, but a short three hours ago, footed it so gaily at her first ball!

At sight of me, she starts back ; then her glance falls on the papers still in my hand, and in a second she has snatched them from me, passionate anger scorching up the shame in her brown eyes. Alas ! poor child, she thinks I have learnt her secret from them!

"Green Sleeves," I say gently, "I have not read one word, for there is no need. I know the truth—I have known it all along."

The manuscript falls with a crash to the floor. I dare not look at her, but I think her agony of shame is hidden by two little, trembling hands. . . . I had as lief stab her tender body through and through as put her soul to such torture as this ; but, when plain, bold speech, may, perchance, save her, shall I shrink from speaking ?

"Green Sleeves," I say, not looking at her, but, somehow, conscious that her face is to the wall, "how do you expect all this to end ? What can come of it but misery and disappointment ? I thought you too proud to seek to steal from another woman the allegiance that should be hers, too wise with a maiden's pure and gentle wisdom to so lavish your heart's treasures on one who can never make you return in kind—"

"Mr. Dick," she cries, with a sort of desperate wonder, "this—this is not like you ; but I understand . . . I will tear this love from my heart ; I will die in the effort to conquer it, but you shall never see a sign of it again . . . and I thought I had hidden it so well !" She breaks off suddenly in her speech, and, covering her face, writhes to and fro in a very paroxysm of anguished shame.

"Green Sleeves, little one," I say, drawing her towards me as when she was a child, and I sought to comfort her, "should it be so very hard a thing to you to conquer this love ?"

"*Hard ?*" she says, below her breath, her brown eyes for one moment looking into mine with so true, so terrible a faithfulness, as Death himself, methinks, might look on, and pass by. Then she is gone, and, with head averted, is standing by the open window.

"There is one person who loves you, Green Sleeves," I say sadly, "who, but for this misplaced fancy of yours, might make you very happy, as it would have made me could you have loved him."

"It would have made you happy ?" she says, not turning, but the whole slight figure expressing a breathless waiting that somehow startles me.

"Yes . . . the other is . . . such a pity."

"You *wish* it?"

"Yes."

What unacknowledged, hitherto unknown voice within me, even as I speak, cries urgently aloud, "*No*"?

There is a moment's silence, then a little brown head falls forward on the window-sill, and still there is silence—no one has ever heard a heart break.

"Child," I cry, "what can I say to you? I can give you no hope; there is that between you and your love that only death can set aside . . . and you are not capable of the baseness of so building your hopes. There is nothing for it but to overcome this love, and so earn your own respect and mine."

"*Respect!*"

Did she utter the word, or is it but the echo in my ears of the last word of my own speech?

"Siva loves you," I go on; "he is honourable, faithful, honest. I think he would make you happy; and, some day, you would look back upon this madness in pity and in wonder, and smile, as you said, 'I was very young!'"

"And is not youth the best time to love, to be faithful, to be unselfish in?" she cries, half lifting her pale face. "I do not desire happiness, if to be happy is to be wise and successful! Not even to please you," she adds, and I can scarcely hear her, for her head has fallen again, "can I marry him."

"This is a poor home for you at the best," I say, looking round at the narrow room, the humble furniture, "and, for years and years you would have to live here just as it is; while Siva can give you a home worthy of you, and in which you could take delight."

"Mr. Dick," she cries, not looking round, "I know how it is—and—and Lady Hungerford was talking to me last night of how it was not right to *you* that I should throw away the chance, if any one was so good as to love me, for that you were all out in the world, now, and dear old Pink May stayed on

here only on my account . . . and I will not be a burden to you any longer, for I will go away, but I will not marry Lord Siva."

"Green Sleeves," I cry, starting up, "is that why you were all at once so ready to leave the ball, and spoke so little coming home?"

"Yes," she says, dully; "it had never struck me before what a *burden* I must be to you. I was grateful with all my heart and soul to you, and I never forget that I have no right to bear the name of Sieviking, by which strangers address me; but, somehow, this little old house has always seemed to me your home, till you had regained the other, and—and I did not know I was in any one's way."

"Green Sleeves," I say sternly, "you know that it is not so—that we love you dearly, and that you are the very sunshine of the house: it is because you will not strive to pluck this sinful passion from your heart that you talk of leaving us."

"Sinful?" she echoes, with a kind of wonder in her voice. "O! you are going too far . . . I will not submit to it. Who was it that said, 'And if I love thee, what is that to thee'? and my love is like that—it is nothing to any one but me, it can hurt no one but me, and—and—"

She shivers through and through, as though her heart were turned to ice.

"If shame and degradation could kill love," she goes on, "then mine would be *dead*. It must be a poor thing, and without pride, to be living yet, must it not?"

I cannot answer her; I know now that it would have been better that I had held my peace.

I have torn the veil from her shrinking heart to no purpose, save by the fires of pain to burn still deeper into it her unhappy love.

"I thought I had hidden it so well," she says, with a sudden break in her miserable young voice. "I tried so hard . . . but now there is only one thing left to do, to go away for ever; and in time, perhaps, you will forget that I was ever so foolish."

She has subsided into a heap on the ground. Suddenly I cross the narrow room, and, kneeling beside her, seek to draw her hands away from the face that I have only seen for one moment during the whole interview.

"Do not touch me," she cries, even fiercely, "you have held me up to my own contempt, and now do you wish to *see* the extent of the bitter humiliation you have inflicted?"

"Child," I cry, "was it not for your good? Do you suppose it makes me happy to see you wretched?"

"I have been wretched for years and years," she says, "but, until now, I have never been *ashamed*. I—I think I would rather die than look you in the face again; and, please God," she adds passionately, "I never will."

"What will you do, Green Sleeves?" I say, ceasing in my efforts to remove those screening fingers, and with something of that feeling of cold, of *loss* at my heart that touched it when I knew we had lost Sieviking.

She shrinks away from me till her brows are against the wall, but answers not a word.

"Charolais," I say sternly, "is it thus that you take a remonstrance that none but your truest friend would have spoken? Should I have been doing my duty to let you go dreaming on—"

"I never dreamed, or hoped, or looked forward to anything," she cries desperately. "I was content to just *exist*—I was even proud of that which made life so beautiful to me; but now I could wish the heart would cease to beat from which I am not able at once to tear this despised love. And you will go away now, if you please, Mr. Dick."

"No," I say resolutely, "I will not go away until you have promised me that you will let all be as though I had never spoken; that you will not for one moment think of anything so mad as leaving us—for that is what is in your thoughts at this moment."

She only presses her head lower against the wall, her whole

attitude expressing a strong disgust that arouses my wonder and disapproval. After all, is she one of those women to whom one dare not speak the truth when it is unpalatable? I had thought her very different.

"Charolais, is it possible to run away from one's own heart? Others are unhappy too, and they have to bear their troubles as best they may—for they cannot be overcome, like yours, by an effort of will."

She turns slightly, but in another moment shrinks back into her former position.

"And so, since we are both so wretched, shall we not try to bear with and solace one another, not quarrel, child?"

"No," she says dully; "the house would be a prison to me—I could not breathe in it—we can be friends still, Mr. Dick . . . at a distance, but I must go."

"You shall not go," I say quietly; "you shall never leave the shelter of my roof till you go to that of a husband's, so make up your mind to that—for wherever you go, I will find you, and fetch you back again."

"O!" she cries passionately; "you will make me *hate* you . . . why should I not stay? for the cure is more than half complete already . . . and now, if you have one instinct of manliness, one trace of resemblance to the Mr. Dick that I used to know, *leave me!*"

"You will not drive me from you by taunts," I say; "and I will not leave you—I swear it, Green Sleeves—till you have promised me that you will not go away from here till I give you leave."

"That is the last, the manliest stroke of all," she says faintly; "I am in your power; I am bound to you by a hundred ties of gratitude—"

"And in payment of them," I say calmly, "I demand this promise—after that you owe me nothing; we are quits."

As one who has arrived at the very end of her strength, she gasps out the words,—

"I promise." . . . then, as I linger a moment, she lifts her hand, and points to the door.

"Go!"

As I close it behind me, I hear her drag herself towards it, and turn the key. And then there is silence—for hours and hours there is silence, and my heart grows harder and more bitter against Ullathorne as the day wears on.

CHAPTER VII.

"Nor blows the wind within my glove,
Bowing down, bowing down;
Nor runs my mind on another love,
And aye the birks are bowing."

At mid-day, there comes a timid knock at my door. I can scarcely control my voice to say, "Come in." I do not lift my eyes, as a little figure crosses the threshold, and comes to my side; but Green Sleeves does not smell of lavender, there is never more than the breath of a wild flower, or the scent of a rose about her, and without looking up, I become aware that my visitor is Pink May.

"Lord Siva is here," she says; "but, of course, he thinks you are at hospital, and I did not say you were in, as I know you hate to be disturbed."

"Well?"

"He wants to see Charolais; but she won't come down, or even open her door, and there is the poor young man waiting in the parlour. So lucky, dear, that I had just dressed myself for the day!"

"Can't you make him transfer his attentions to *you*, aunt?" I say wearily. "Tell him to come to me here."

"Why, who would have thought of finding you at home at this hour?" cries Siva, as he enters. "Old fellow," he adds, as he closes the door, "you'll think me hasty and premature, coming here to-day, but I couldn't wait; she was so kind,

so different to what she usually is to me, last night, that I feel *now* is the time to once more put my fortune to the touch."

How bright he looks, how eager . . . how full of the gifts of fortune is the hand that would take my little Green Sleeves, and hold her in its safe keeping till her life's end . . . and I can speak to him no word of hope; that one look she gave me when she said, "*Hard?*" seems burnt in upon my eyes; nor Siva, nor any other, could teach that fierce faithfulness to forget, or unroll to those beautiful eyes a more profound love than that which they have already known.

"Siva," I say, looking up, and seeming to see suddenly reflected in his bright face my own haggard looks, "you could not have come at a worse time. I spoke to her this morning, and this—man, as yet holds complete possession of her heart."

He stares at me for a moment, the gladness dying suddenly out; then, seizing my arm, cries,—

"Sieviking, *who is it?*"

"That is for her," I say, "not us."

His eyes search mine, but do not find in them "Ullathorne."

"And there is *no* hope?" he says bitterly.

"Some day there may be; but I've a notion, Siva, that she's that rare thing among women—faithful."

"She seemed so happy with me last night," he says, walking to the window, and looking abroad; "did not care to dance with any one, to be with any one, but me, and all the while, she was kind to me only as a *friend*. Well, if she can be faithful, so can I. So help me God, if I cannot get Charolais to be my wife, I will never marry living woman. Sieviking, am I personally displeasing to her? did she say *why* she could not love me?"

"It is not you; it is that her heart is so full of some one else, that there is not room for even a fancy to creep in. This unhappy, hopeless love—"

"Hopeless?" he cries quickly.

"Utterly; it can end in nothing."

"Then I have a chance, yet," he cries, throwing up his arms. "Sieviking, has it ever struck you that the persons who are pointed out to us as models of constancy, are thus admirable only because they have not been pressed hard enough, or by the right person, to forget? I don't believe in a woman feeding on a still-born love for ever, when a warm, loving one is close at hand, and waiting her acceptance. I will wait, and, please God, win my little sweetheart in spite of all, at last."

"And you could bear that?" I say, looking at him curiously, "to take this poor, second love that has become your own only because another man could not, or would not receive it?"

"The second love is the best," he says. "I would welcome from her *any* love that she pleased to give me."

"Then you are not like me; I would take none but the first—and last."

"No," he says, as he takes up his hat to go, "I am not like you; I never knew any one that was. I shall not come here again, but—I shall wait."

Long after he has gone, I sit at my table, all my heart and thoughts with that little lonely figure above stairs.

The sun has left the cherry-tree in shadow when sounds of a commotion, strictly feminine, and on a large scale, penetrate to my sanctum; they even approach my door, which presently flying open, admits not one woman, or even two, or three, but *five*.

Bell leads the van, sweeping a small son along in her skirts with as irresistible an impulse as a leaf driven of the wind. Cynthia follows, stepping delicately, her train thrown over her arm, Hetty at her heels, Jill, with a twin on one arm, bringing up the rear, while Pink May is dimly visible beyond. Bell makes for the only easy chair the room contains, and, sinking into it, melts slowly and by almost imperceptible gradations into tears.

"What is the matter?" I cry, really alarmed; "is Sir Peter dead, or ruined—or—have you got another baby? But that's impossible," I add hastily, "for you danced at your own ball last night."

"No," says Bell, "though I think I might almost sacrifice myself to the extent of *that*, rather than see such a chance flung away."

"What does it all mean?" I say, bewildered, and looking round at the harem into which my room has suddenly been transformed, every available perch being occupied by a young woman, while Pink May finds a seat on a round coal-box just inside the door, and I'm much mistaken if Ariel does not lend a willing ear to the key-hole without.

"You are a baby yourself," cries Bell indignantly; "why don't you use your influence with that child to prevent her being such an utter insensate idiot as to refuse Lord Siva?"

"So *that* is what you are looking such a picture of misery about?" I say, smiling in spite of myself; "now what possible difference can it make to you whether she does or does not marry Siva?"

"It shall never be said of me that I stood by and saw two people *ruin* themselves for want of a word in season," says Bell, drying her eyes; "as nobody else seems inclined to speak out, I must."

"Don't," I say abruptly; "unsought advice never did any good yet. You can urge nothing on her in his favour that I have not already done—uselessly."

"*You* have urged her to marry Siva?" exclaims Bell, in a tone of relief, while Jill, who is nearest to me, looks up suddenly.

"Yes—with all my heart."

"I told you so, Bell," says Cynthia languidly; "and that you needn't be at all uneasy."

"Then, why is she refusing Siva?" persists Bell; "if she is in love with somebody else, it doesn't make it a bit better that

somebody else isn't in love with her—she must be *made* to give over such folly, and accept him ! ”

I look across at Hetty, in sudden fear. Has she found out thus late in the day her husband's secret ?

But her beautiful face is vacant of the slightest concern as she smiles down on Jill's little twin, who had seized one of her ribbons in its tiny fist, and in all good faith proceeds to eat it.

“ I don't think she wants to marry anybody,” says Pink May, shaking her curls gravely ; “ and indeed when I was a young girl the idea of marriage was abhorrent to me.”

“ She shall not be argued or forced into anything,” I say quietly ; “ if in time she can overcome her objection to Siva, well and good ; if not, there will always be a home for her here.”

“ And have you thought of what your future wife may say to such an arrangement ? ” says Bell curiously.

“ I shall never marry.”

“ So every man says till he meets the right, or wrong woman—and it's my firm belief that you'll marry the *wrong* one.”

“ Bell has got a ridiculous idea,” says Cynthia (who was born without tact, and by the force of circumstances has never had occasion to require any), “ that Charolais is in love with *you*—and she certainly is far prettier than Florizel, you know.”

“ So *that* is why you are so anxious for her to marry Siva ? ” I say. “ Well, make your mind easy on that score, Bell, and leave us in peace. You did quite enough mischief when you spoke to her last night—you made her feel her dependence as she has never felt it before.

“ She deserved to,” cries Bell. “ When I *dragged* from her that Siva had already proposed, and that she had refused him, I grew warm, I must confess it ; for how often, now-a-days, does a penniless girl, without a relative, get such a chance as that ? Why, I myself, in the Trevelyan days, would not have despised a well-to-do rector—it was a stroke of pure good luck that sent Sir Peter to the vicarage garden party to quiz the

rustics, though it was my own address that made him find himself the *quizzed*; and after that, Cynthia and Hetty married well, as a matter of course, and Jill might have, too, if she had had any sense, and in that case would never have disgraced herself with twins—but where was I?"

Where, indeed? But Cynthia, with admirable common sense, supplies the cue.

"Charolais's luck—without any relatives, you know."

"Yes. He began raving about her to me after she had gone last night; and, of course, I got the whole business out of him in two minutes, and I put it to him, would he not have *preferred* her having a father—or even a mother? He said he should come and ask her again this morning, and I had given her such a sound talking to, that I felt nearly certain she would say 'Yes.'"

"So did I," says Cynthia, yawning. "It seems odd for a girl in her position, but she is positively proud."

"I worked myself into quite a fever over it," continues Bell, "and as Cynthia and Hetty were lunching with me, I thought we'd come together and hear the upshot of the interview, and on the way picked up Jill, so that we might *all* talk to her if she were obstinate."

Alas! poor Green Sleeves! As I look at the four blooming young matrons before me, and think of them sitting in council upon her, I cannot forbear a smile.

"You would not be hard on her, would you, old girl?" I say, patting my dear Jill's hand.

"And what do I find?" says Bell, in such deep tones of tragedy as causes her small son to cling to her in amazement. "Charolais locked in her room—Siva been and gone—she even refusing to see him! I wonder the roof does not fall in on such sinful folly!"

"There, there," I say wearily, "it is no such great thing after all: leave the child alone, Bell; perhaps time may set matters straight."

"Time!" she echoes indignantly. "Meanwhile, Dick, I have some news for *you*."

"Well?"

"The old earl is dead, and Florizel is free."

I am not able to hide the sudden change that comes over my face—her news has leaped out upon, and taken me unawares.

"When did you hear it?"

"This morning."

Their faces grow dim to me . . . then disappear altogether . . . how shall I bear to see her, to rip up the terrible past; just, too, as I was gathering some peace of mind—even at intervals, learning to *forget*. . .

"And she does not like Charolais," says Cynthia, her phlegmatic voice seeming to sound from a long way off. "The last time she wrote to me she said, 'Is that child whom Dick used to be so fond of *married* yet?'"

"H'm," says Bell, watching me intently, "you're not in love with Florizel; you and she are perfectly good friends, but never mean to marry; nevertheless, you can't hear her name mentioned without changing countenance. By-the-bye, do you intend to receive her, when she comes, in this *hovel*?"

"Ladies don't usually visit men in their own houses."

"She will come to see aunt," says Bell, drily. "Why not move into a better house? You can afford it now, as I hear you have given up that ridiculous idea of buying back Sieviking; but perhaps it will be better to wait till you settle down for good."

"I have asked Florizel to come to me for the present," says Hetty, as they all stand up to go, the dull room looking as if a rainbow had got in, and then broken itself into bits. "She has no near relations, you know. I will tell you as soon as she has arrived."

"Don't come to the door with us," says Bell, as she stands on tiptoe to kiss me. "I was in such a hurry to tell you

about the old earl, and to find out what luck Siva had had, that I came down in my own carriage. But if you don't come up the servants will never guess it's *you* who live here. Really this visit has quite relieved me. Ta-ta."

When they have all gone, my head falls forward on the table, my nails dug into my palms, in one of those fierce paroxysms of self-contempt in which the spirit loathes its dwelling-place, and would cast it off had Will the power to do it.

It is not our own wrong-doing, or that of others, that kills . . . it is the shame of our own contempt that sinks the god-head in the worm, and causes us to writhe in the dust.

"Dick," cries Jill's voice in terror; "Dick, what is it? O! my poor boy, are you suffering as well as she?"

"*She?*" I cry fiercely. "Oh! never fear that *she* will suffer. What am I saying?" I dash my hand across my brow and look wildly around.

"But she does, Dick, terribly—"

"What do you know of it?" I cry, staring at her. "What is she to you? You are mad, Jill, mad—"

"Dick," she says, shrinking a little away from me, "I think I understand . . . but if you love her, and she loves you, what is there to hinder you being happy together?"

"*Love?*" I stare at her with such hatred and loathing in my eyes as makes her cry out and put up her hands before her own.

"What has she done to you that you should look like that?" she says fearfully.

"Done? O! my God! is it nothing to have coiled round and choked the life out of all that is good in a man—to have slain all lofty ideals, all pure hopes in him—to have sapped his energy with poisonous sweetness: but last, and worst of all, to have shattered his self-respect, and rendered him unfit in his own eyes to do work for either God or man?"

"And has she done all this?" says Jill, trembling, "our

little Charolais, who has made our home so happy, and whom we have all loved so dearly?"

"Charolais?" I repeat, staring at her. "Who spoke of her? Ah! I remember—we were talking of her just now. Bell was angry because she would not marry Siva. And she locked herself into her room; she must be hungry and faint by now, poor little soul."

"Dick," says Jill, approaching me timidly, as one in fear, and drawing my head down to her breast, "won't you tell her all about it, your faithful Jill, who loves you dearly?"

For a moment my head lies on that pure haven, then the thought of where it last rested suddenly stings me through and through, and I tear it away. "There—go," I say, kissing her pale lips, "no one, not even you, can help me."

CHAPTER VIII.

"O! God, Horatio, what a wounded name!"

"If you can meet me with one-half only of the contempt I feel for myself, be in the flower-walk of Kensington Gardens at five o'clock to-morrow afternoon."

Will she come? Five has struck, and there is no sign of her.

The flower-walk is growing empty—the children are trooping homeward—it is a quarter-past five; she is not coming.

No man of spirit would wait more than twenty minutes for any woman; at the end of that time I turn on my heel homeward, and at the first step come face to face with Florizel. She has been running, and is out of breath; the colour in her face renders less sombre her robes of deepest mourning.

"Oh! Dick," she cries pleadingly, "I am so sorry; but I met Hetty in the drive, and I knew you would not like her to know I was going to meet you here, so I had to put her off the scent, and that made me late."

There is no contempt in her voice—in her hand's warm clasp: but I have not met her eyes, and eyes never lie, no matter how the voice, complexion, and touch may. We turn aside to the trees, and again it is she who speaks, looking anxiously into my face.

"Dick, aren't you glad to see me? have you not a word of welcome for me?"

"No," I say bitterly, "I am *not* glad to see you, Florizel. If I did not love you so dearly I should say I prayed God I might never see your face, or hear your voice again. I suppose it is easier to bear one's own contempt than that of others, though I used to hold a contrary belief. I believe in nothing now—but you."

Our eyes meet at last; my heart softens; I take the little ungloved hand and lift it to my lips.

A shadow seems to flit by—I look up; some one has passed us whose face I cannot see, but the shape—is it not that of Green Sleeves?

Obedying a sudden impulse, I start up, but she has vanished; surely she is yonder—but no, when I have overtaken the figure, a strange face is turned to me. I return slowly to Florizel, puzzled and at fault.

"I thought it was Green Sleeves," I say, sitting down again.

"And do you not see her every day?" says Florizel, with something chill, unusual in her voice that makes me turn to look at her.

"No—I have not once seen or spoken to her for three weeks."

"Ah!" the tone grows absolutely cold. "You have been quarrelling, perhaps?"

"Florizel," I say gravely, "I want you and Green Sleeves, of all people in the world, to be friends—you scarcely saw her before you went away, but if you were better acquainted, you couldn't help loving her."

"Could I not?"

"She is not happy," I say, looking away to the silvery streak of water that shows between the trees. "No more are we—and, forgive me, my poor Florizel, but I had forgotten; I have not said one word to you" (I touch her black gown) "of *this*."

She turns her head aside; but I think that for the moment her heart is not with the father that she tended so long and faithfully.

"And why is she not happy?" she says, not looking round. "She is near you always; she shares your labours, has the right to sit by your side, to wait upon you, while I—"

The two last words, sunk to a whisper, barely reach my ears.

"What makes every one unhappy," I say bitterly, "but love, or the bastard imitation of it? This poor child does but share the common lot, only she is young to be made to suffer so."

"Does one suffer any the less because one is past the freshness of youth?" she cries, a dull note of anguish running through her voice. "Youth, at least, is beautiful, and has hope, its springs are yet unbroken; it has *time*, if its first blossoms be blighted, to bloom again."

"There will be no second love for her, or I am much mistaken," I say, my thoughts still filled by that flitting figure, "its roots have struck down into her very soul. You saw something of it before you went away, Florizel," I say, addressing her eagerly. "I did not understand you when you gave me some hints at Cannes, but I do now; tell me, did it strike you as being a thing she was ever likely to *get over*?"

For a moment there flashes into Florizel's eyes something of the contempt that awhile ago I looked to find, then she says, slowly, "No; I do not think she will ever get over it."

"And it is so hopeless, so *utterly* hopeless?" I say restlessly. "If only she would consent to marry Siva, I could be almost content."

"She never will. She is faithful; there are women like that."

"There are women better than that," I say warmly, as I take her hand once more, "who are noble, unselfish, who restore a man's self-respect, so far as it can be restored, by giving him, even in his degradation, a place in their esteem—"

"I beg your pardon," says Mr. Squiffer, appearing with an elaborately composed face round the tree, "but have you seen Charolais? We were to meet her at the Round Pond at half-past five, but we can't find her anywhere."

"Confound you," I cry in a rage, and dropping Florizel's hand, "how should I know?"

He retreats with a broad grin, and being joined by Solomon, they depart together, laughing heartily.

"It is time for me to go home," says Florizel, standing up, a weary look on the odd irregular face that not so long ago was my ideal of what a woman's and a wife's should be.

Can it be only three months since when to marry her seemed to me the highest joy attainable, when I longed after her as the poor wretch, immured in his dungeon, pines and thirsts for a breath of God's pure air?

She was out of my reach then; she is no more out of my reach now, but a subtle change has come; as in earnest talk we cross the burnt-up grass, I find time to ask myself in vain from what hidden cause it springs.

"I thought it would be a hard thing to meet you again," I say to her, in my selfishness, as we part at the gates, "but you have made it almost easy—"

She looks at me for a moment, a strange light on the pure pale face, and only when she has gone do I remember to ask myself, what have I made things to the woman who has made them so easy to me?

CHAPTER IX.

"For the flower that springs in May morning,
Is nae sweeter as she."

DAY by day a fever grows in my veins, a restless vague *want* takes possession of me.

My ears, formerly so dull to aught that lay without my work, grow quick to harken for interruptions that I formerly reckoned as too frivolous to effect a diversion of thought; a snatch of song, a ripple of laughter, an impertinent nosegay smiling up at me from an open page, an atmosphere, unacknowledged but felt, of brightness and youth, and love, that played about me with a breath pure and sweet as that of heaven.

"I don't know what you have done to Charolais," says the Squiffer, furiously, to me one day; "but she is fit for nothing—can't even run a race, or take a bat, or even hold her own if we chaff her. If you've been quarrelling with her—and if you have, it must be *your* fault, not hers, the sooner you make it up the better."

Siva has gone away, and the little culprit upstairs has been sat upon in judgment, and formally consigned to that perdition which awaits all young women who, having had an eligible offer of marriage, have sinfully refused it. Jill has been to me more than once, pleading to be allowed to take Green Sleeves home with her, but I forbade it, and she went away, thinking perhaps that our cruelties to our enemies are positive kindnesses compared with those that we practise towards the people whom we love.

And why do I not let her go? It would be better for her—for me, for Siva; she would be taken out of herself, she would not have the same leisure for ever to brood as now over one image. I have always thought that the intensity of a woman's faithfulness depends a great deal on circumstance—for instance, whether any other man of equal moral stature has laid real

vigorous siege to her heart; whether her time is her own, in which she has nothing else to do but remember him; or whether the daily work that falls to her hand so engrosses her attention as to give her no time to form the habit of remembering.

Set a woman to sweep or scrub, to brew or bake, to work for others, and ten to one if at the end of a week you don't dub her fickle; concentrate her thoughts on self, and that other who is but another form of self, and you have a paragon of sublime constancy.

Shall I let the child go? She has made it a question of, whether she or I tire first, and, already, I tire.

She could not hide herself from me at Jill's as she does here; she would be obliged to sit at the same table, to speak to me. I should be able to compel a glance from the brown eyes that I miss so terribly, and that come between me and my work, and even between me and Florizel, as of an evening I sit by her side at one or other of my sisters' houses.

Yes; she shall go. My resolution once taken, I shut my book, and go upstairs to the parlour, but she is not there.

Hitherto, I have not sought her; it would have been a breach of honour, seeing how I wrung that promise from her; but, on the other hand, I have not gone out of my way to avoid her. Her care has sufficed for both; not once have I caught a glimpse of her, save in that momentary one at Kensington Gardens, for above a month.

It was growing dusk when I made my resolution. The house is wrapped in a drowsy quiet, as I go up the stairs to the little room in which I know she is to be found.

"Charolais!"

She must have been just inside the door, for, as I speak it opens, as though I had breathed it apart, and Green Sleeves stands before me.

Enough of light comes through the window behind, to show her as she stands, her brown eyes dull with misery, her little

face pallid and pinched with pain ; slender hands clasped together, and pressed hard against her bosom.

"I'm tired, Solomon," she says, "and it's too late to go and search for codlings and cream to-night."

"It is not, Solomon," I say. "Charolais," I go on abruptly, "I have come to tell you that you shall do as you will—you shall go. I will write to Jill to-night to fetch you to-morrow."

No answer, only an averted head, an attitude of waiting.

"Is not that what you wished?" I say restlessly; "is there *no* pleasing you, Charolais?"

"Why do you not call me Green Sleeves?" she says, so low that I can scarcely hear her.

"No," I say bitterly; "that was the name of a little girl who is dead—this new one, who in her selfish sorrow makes others unhappy also, is Charolais."

"*You* are unhappy?" she cries quickly. "When—O! no, that is impossible."

"As you please. You will be ready to go with Jill to-morrow?" No answer.

"I shall have left before you are risen, so good-night and good-bye, Charolais."

She turns; I get a moment's, only a moment's glimpse of her eyes.

"Oh! Mr. Dick! Mr. Dick!" she says, scarce above a whisper, and, as I move a step towards her, the brown head falls forward, and rests a moment upon my arm . . . and, somehow, I understand how at a bound she has gone back to the old childish days, the old childish love and worship, and how for one brief moment all the misery, the sin, and the misunderstanding that has come between us, is blotted out . . . we are children once again, bound to each other by a hundred ties of reality and of hope.

"Green Sleeves," I say, as I enter the room and close the door behind me, "you shall not go, I cannot spare you; you shall stay, and we will be wretched together."

I cannot see her face, it is covered : but she is standing beside me, and that is enough.

"Child," I say abruptly, "have you ever thought of what this house is to me now—how dreary, how empty? And yet *you* would leave me, the last link that binds me to the old times ! When I was young and happy, you made yourself my joy and my delight ; but now that I want you, you would leave me lonely,"

"Do you want me ? " she says, trembling ; "would you miss me ? "

"So badly, that if you go away, I go too ; for I cannot live here without you."

"Then I will stay," she says, looking up, not *at* me, but with just a half-glance, as though to show me, if I had forgotten, how sweet and true are the beautiful dark eyes.

I draw one of those little hands from her face, and, as I press it against my heart, rest and peace seem to come back to my bosom ; the restless ache and longing are stilled, my ills seem bearable now that she and I again are friends.

"Mr. Dick," she says presently, and now the dusk has softly covered her face and she no longer needs to hide it, "ought you to be so very unhappy now—now *she* has come back ? "

"I shall be unhappy always, more or less, to my life's end."

"Then she does not love you as she ought," cries Green Sleeves impetuously, "or she would make you—happy."

"No one living could make me that now. Circumstances might occur to render me less wretched, but my life at best can be but one of endurance."

"Mr. Dick," she says very low, "Oh ! what is it ? Won't you tell me ? "

"I made a mistake, child," I say sadly, "that is all, and I cannot tell you."

"I do not understand it," she says restlessly. "She loves you—you love her, and yet you are wretched. It *must* be her fault—a hers."

"Green Sleeves," I say sternly, "never say one word against her—the truest, the purest, the best woman God ever made"—I pause abruptly. Truest, purest, best, indeed she is, but the sweetest, the one woman in the world to me?

"I thought once," says Green Sleeves, gently, "that—that there was somebody else; but when I saw you that day with—*her* in the gardens I knew I had been mistaken."

"Then it *was* you?" I cry quickly.

"Yes—I had gone there to meet the boys."

"I wish you could be friends, child," I say sadly; we could all be so happy together. I think, under some circumstances, true friendship might almost take the place of love."

"O! what a barren exchange!" she cries, the words seeming to be flashed out of her; "and I do not think I could be happy with your Lady Florizel," she adds stiffly.

"I wonder why the women one likes best always like each other least?" I say, puzzled. "One would think that the liking for a common object would be a bond between them."

"Oh! Mr. Dick," she says, and there is actually the echo of a laugh on her lips, "after all, you do not know the world very well yet!"

"Why, Green Sleeves," I cry joyfully, "you can laugh—you can be saucy—I do believe we have some chance of being happy again. Now, are you quite sure you would rather not go away?"

"Quite sure."

"To tell you a secret, Green Sleeves, it would be all the same if you did; for I would have locked you up, starved—even beaten you rather."

CHAPTER X.

“ And fair Marg’ret and rare Marg’ret,
And Marg’ret o’ veritie,
Gin e’er ye love another man,
Ne’er love him as you did me.”

As a bird that once scared away by a familiar hand now fears to come again within reach of it, I have to win my Lady Green Sleeves back, and it is long indeed e’er confidence is regained, or the ease of friendship established between us.

But the old happy security is passed away—a chance word, a look will drive her from my side for days, and then it is only by infinite patience and difficulty that I can tempt her to return.

At best I can win from her no more than a half-glance, and that but a fleeting one—all my stratagems to get a real look from those dark eyes are in vain, and I gradually make up my mind that until I have obtained it, it is quite impossible that we should consider our reconciliation complete.

“Green Sleeves,” I said to her one day, “you told me once that you would never, please God, set eyes upon me again so long as you lived. But then you were angry—do you think it fair to abide by that speech now that we are friends again?”

But I got no answer. She was gone in a moment, and it took me a whole week of patient care to undo the effect of my rash speech.

Rarely indeed can I beguile her to my den, and then only on the pretext that there is something to be done that she alone can do, and once having persuaded her there, I devise a dozen pretexts for detaining her, quite satisfied if I can occupy her with something that keeps her seated for a few moments beside me, as she used to sit, neither of us speaking, but each happy in the mere fact of being near the other.

To-night I have so laid a snare for her, and as she sits beside me, scissors in hand, intent on the task I have given her,

I can look at her to my heart's content, being so very certain that there is not the smallest chance of her looking at me.

I wonder where the fascination that this young person undoubtedly exercises over every male with whom she comes in contact, lies?

True her face is full of charms that peep out on you unexpectedly, and are not learnt all at once like the numbered and duly apprized ones of a titular beauty, but then it is full of irregularities, and her nose would assuredly arouse in a sculptor no other sensation than that of contempt.

She wears a white gown, and has tied her hair to-day (is a woman's dress any index to her thoughts?) with a blue ribbon; but some silky bits have escaped, and lie on her forehead. Some more of the same dark silk sweeps the clear cheek, into which a little colour has come, the tender young lips are touched with a deeper red; at a first glance one might suppose this girl to be happy. . . .

"I have cut out all the pieces you marked," she says, laying down the scissors; and, as I take the extracts from her hand, the door opens to admit—Florizel.

"O! Dick," she cries eagerly, and then stops short at sight of Green Sleeves, who has risen. Five years have changed the one into a girl, the other into a woman; but surely they have not altered each past recognition?

"Why," I say, leading Green Sleeves forward, "you surely have not forgotten one another?"

"Is that Charolais?" she says carelessly, and then there is a cold hand-shake between them, and Florizel and I are alone.

"I have something to tell you," she says; "I have not seen you for some days, and feared to write it, and that is why I am here this evening." She breaks off in her speech suddenly.

"Dick," she says, "is it *right*?"

"Is what right?" I cry, thinking how a woman's mind will dart away from a momentous matter to a trivial one, giving to the latter all the attention that the former requires.

"After what you told me about her the other day, is it not folly—madness?"

"How can my having her with me alter the facts? It is far better to take her out of her thoughts, to rouse her, than to leave her to brood alone over one unhappy idea."

"Your cure is a strange one," she says, so bitterly that I look at her in wonder, "only take care that in this instance it is not worse than the complaint."

CHAPTER XI.

"But doth not the appetite alter? A man loves the meat in his youth that he cannot endure in his age."

"It may be a mere matter of taste," says Pink May, "but in my young days ladies did *not* call on unmarried gentlemen, and remain closeted with them three hours at a time."

"They're going to be married," says Solomon, "and why shouldn't she? Why, in Cornwall, when a man thinks of getting married, he takes the girl home for two or three days, to see how he likes her, before making up his mind; and if she doesn't please him, he just bundles her home again, and nobody says anything. And though I don't mind admitting that it's going rather too far," continues Solomon, puffing solemnly at his pipe, "still it's high time that some of the nonsense about never leaving two young people of opposite sexes alone together, was thrown overboard. How is a man to get a good notion of a woman's disposition if he never sees her except with her society-manner on?"

"There are proprieties, dear boy," says Pink May, "and the rules of society must be observed."

"And I say they are *rotten* rules," cries Solomon warmly, "and that it's paying a precious bad compliment to men, and women too, to suppose that the mere fact of being in each

other's company suggests evil. I suppose men are not all scoundrels, and every woman's virtue is not a cloak, to be slipped off and on at pleasure—"

"Hush!" says Pink May, "here is Charolais."

"They manage things much better in America," the young man goes on more calmly, as a tall glow-worm seems to approach the seat below the cherry-tree that is the usual rendezvous after dark these hot evenings; "there they have chances of studying each other's characters; they find out before marriage, instead of after, if they don't suit, and look out for somebody who does."

"What is Solomon holding forth about?" says the Squiffer, as he sits down by the others. "Here is your shawl, Charolais."

"Marriage," says Solomon. "Now, if ever I do get married I'll make or find an opportunity beforehand for a good, downright, thumping quarrel; for, in my opinion, that's about the *only* sure way of getting at a woman's real character."

"And pray," says the Squiffer, "has anybody in particular suggested the idea of matrimony to your brilliant intelligence?"

"It was Dick, dear boy," says Pink May. "Lady Florizel has been to see him this evening, you know, and he has just taken her away again."

"Whew!" whistles the Squiffer; "so that was the carriage that nearly knocked me down at the corner, and made me wonder if the Lord Mayor had suddenly yearned for a sight of Picotee Lane!"

"Yes," says Solomon, "there's no ridiculous stuck-up pride about *her*, and I like her. I think Dick's a very lucky man—don't you, Charolais?"

"I say," says the Squiffer, "have you made sure that he's gone? He can hear every word from his den, you know."

"I went and looked; of course he took her home—I should under the circumstances."

"O! she's not much to look at, and she's no chicken; she must be twenty-five if she's a day."

"She's none the worse for that," says Solomon, loftily; "for my part, I don't like your very young girls—of course, Charolais, *you* are an exception."

"In short," says the Squiffer, "you like 'em mellow. Well, Dick doesn't, and he'll never marry Lady Florizel as long as he lives."

"Pooh!" says Solomon; "it didn't look at all like courting, did it, when you popped round that tree, and there they were, hand in hand, with their noses touching? Though to be sure," he adds complacently, "if Dick means nothing, and she has a fancy for being in the family, I shouldn't half mind proposing for her myself."

A shout of laughter follows this modest speech, which Solomon takes somewhat seriously to heart.

"Let me tell you," he says, with dignity, "that Dick is getting old too, and is not half so handsome as he used to be. Perhaps Lady Florizel might prefer something younger, and more lively."

"O! Solomon," says Green Sleeves, laughing heartily, "had you not better propose to me first, just to get your hand in? I will promise not to accept you, however much I might feel tempted."

"I would like a shot, if I thought you'd have me," he says, with perfect gravity.

"It would be very nice; but, I'm afraid I am too young," she says, "and yet I am—twenty! Five years too old—just five years too old, auntie—only five." . . . Her voice ends in a sob, and a moment ago her laughter mocked me in my wretchedness.

"Why, what is this?" cries Pink May, tenderly (God bless her!) "You are tired, Charolais;" and I think she draws the brown head down to her faithful heart.

"It's all that Dick," says Solomon vexedly; "she always cries after she has been sitting with or talking to him—don't cry, *dear* Charolais." And I think that he, too, is trying to dry her eyes in the dark with his own pocket handkerchief.

"We haven't been nearly so happy since he came back," says the Squiffer, grumblingly, "and as to Charolais, she's not the same girl—but don't cry, dear little Charolais, *we* love you, if he doesn't."

"It has struck me," says Solomon, "that perhaps, by accident, you know, he committed a murder while he was abroad, and *that's* what has changed him so. Why, if I had come home with half the money in my pocket that he did, I should walk on my head—it *must* be something very queer to take the shine off his guineas like that, and to make him actually give up the idea of buying back Sieviking."

"How dare you say such wicked things about him!" cries Charolais passionately; "as if he *could* do a mean, or selfish, or dishonourable action—and yet you talk of his committing a cowardly *crime*! If he is not always laughing and talking, like the rest of us, it is because his head is not empty like ours—but full of thoughts that we can't be expected to understand!"

"He is a tyrant," says Solomon, quite unconvinced, "and that's why he lords it so over all you women. When I'm old enough, I mean to be a tyrant, too—the better class of female likes it."

"It is not tyranny to know what is good for you, and make you do it," says Green Sleeves, laughing. (Surely, her moods are very variable to-night?) "Supposing, now, that I told you it was time to go to bed, and *made* you go, would that be tyranny?"

"It would be sense," says Solomon, who is nothing if not practical; and presently there troop past my open window some heavy footsteps and some light, and dawn finds me sitting in the place from which I heard them, as though I waited still their echo, or their return.

CHAPTER XII.

“ Marti’mas wind, when wilt thou blow,
And shake the green leaves off the tree ?
O ! gentle death, when wilt thou come ?
For of my life I am wearie.”

YESTERDAY I had but one secret, to-day I have two.

I hid the other, but this one, that has leaped on me from ambush, unguarded against, unsuspected, to sit down with me beneath my very roof-tree—can I trust myself by neither word, look, nor sign to let it escape me ?

As yet it is my own, and I will guard it as my life—life ! that yesterday was but endurance, that to-day falls little short of hell.

She does not love me, never did, never will—thank God for that ! and yet, but for my mad folly a year ago, she might have done so, and the misery of four lives have been averted.

And this man that she loves, pitiful as I deemed him, I can envy him now. A fierce spasm of jealousy shakes me as I think of the treasure of love poured out on him, yet I would not have it different.

Strange that the only drop of sweet in my bitter cup should be that the woman I love does not love me ; but certain it is that, if I had awakened in her heart such a passion as burns in mine, I should be that compared with which I might to-day reckon myself happy. For this is love, I know it now—nor that pure, steady affection that has burnt so brightly for years, nor that brief delirium in which I flung away all for a mad fancy, were love—but *this*, the seeds of which, long sown, have silently thriven in my heart to quicken to conscious life to-day.

I could thrust that other mistake out of my sight—its hateful existence was recognized, but did not intrude itself on mine ;

but this one—how shall I escape from the daily contemplation of it ?

Dawn has given place to daylight ; the house is astir ; cold and stiff, I am about to rise from my chair, when the door opens, and Green Sleeves comes in.

Her dark hair is turned up under a mob cap, her gown is neatly pinned away out of the dust, in her hand is a freshly-arranged nosegay which, being in a very rickety old glass, she carries with great care, her gaze not leaving it till she has safely deposited it on the table.

Then she sees me, and starts violently, but all the colour that start brings cannot hide the fact that she has been crying ; so more than one has been waking in the house to-night.

"I did not know you were down," she says, "and—and sometimes I come of a morning and put your room straight for you."

And that is why nothing is ever disarranged, yet always so spotlessly free of dust.

"I shall not hinder you, child," I say mechanically ; and then she takes out a duster, and quicker, I think, than usual, and as one who wishes the task over, moves hither and thither, while I sit in my chair and watch her.

When I wanted her presence here, I found it hard and precious to obtain ; now that it is for the first time unwelcome, she comes unasked.

"Green Sleeves," I say, when she has nearly done, "come here."

She comes very slowly ; a quaint little figure, with sleeves rolled away from the white arms, mob-cap a little on one side, the prettiest little feet in the world showing below her short skirts.

"Green Sleeves, would you like to go away ?"

"Go away ?" she repeats, blankly, her eyes actually for a moment meeting mine.

"Yes—for a month or two. Hetty would like to have you for a time."

"Do you wish me to go, Mr. Dick?"

"Yes."

"Then I will go," she says, turning aside; "but . . . it was not so very long ago that you wished me to stay."

"Child," I cry harshly, "I wish to God that when you begged me so hard to let you go, I had granted your request. Now it is too late."

"No," she cries, turning swiftly, but at sight of my face she utters a low cry.

"You are ill," she cries.

"Yes," I say, looking at her with haggard eyes, "ill of something that only death can cure. If ever you pray for me, Charolais, pray that my pain may soon cease."

With a sob she snatches at my clenched hand, and holds it fast between her own, and as beneath that gentle pressure it relaxes, there falls from it a crumpled letter.

She stoops to pick it up, but before she can reach it, I have crushed the paper under foot, though not before I see by her face she has marked the handwriting—a woman's.

"You must be faint with hunger," she says gently, and presently brings me my breakfast, but does not linger a moment after setting it before me.

And as my misery grows, so does her sweetness. Each day it seems to me she grows kinder and more kind; unbidden, now, she sometimes brings her work and sits beside me, wringing my heart to an agony that often makes my voice sound bitter in her ears and my own.

Some day I shall understand why she is so sweet and gentle; why she seeks to prove to me that *my* harshness cannot touch *her* gratitude and affection; that this is indeed her leave-taking, for that she never means to return to us from the journey, now but a week or so distant, that she is to take.

All the sisters have left town; Florizel, too, has gone to her country place, but goes to Hetty in September.

One morning, three days before the date fixed for Green Sleeves' departure, the morning post brings me two letters.

They both bear a foreign post-mark. I open the least important first—it is from Siva. He returns in a fortnight, and goes to the Ullathornes' in September for the shooting, where he is assured by Hetty he will see—Charolais.

I tear open the other letter. It is as I fear. Ullathorne is returning, will be back in time to receive his friends. "I thought," he adds, "that my exile might end now that I know she is going to be married to Siva; this is not quite what I had hoped, but the news has made me very happy. Hetty begged me not to mention it to him, so when I asked him for September, I said nothing about it. Perhaps you will now be inclined to judge me less harshly than you formerly did."

The letter falls from my hands—he is coming back, and beneath his very roof he will find, loving him more passionately than ever,—Green Sleeves.

She must not go. Thank God that this letter has come in time; but how shall I stay her without reopening those wounds that bled so terribly beneath my clumsy touch the only time that I dared speak of him to her?

"I find my opportunity in the evening, when I call her to me, and she comes. Her eyes never fear to meet mine now; in them is a steadfast strength that shines down all thought of self, and her affection for me has assumed so protective a character as sometimes to provoke from me the smile that is akin to a tear.

My haggard looks are mainly responsible for this gentle solicitude; no woman can bear the sight of a man's outward suffering.

"Green Sleeves," I say, as she sits down beside me, "I have some news for you. Guess."

"Anak is coming back?" she cries quickly. "I should like to see him once more before I went away for—" She stops abruptly.

"Can you think of no one else?" I say, watching her

keenly; "no one that you would be more glad to see than Anak?"

"No," she says; "there is nobody."

"Not even Ullathorne?"

"Is *he* coming?" she cries, clapping her hands. "O! I am so glad; and won't Hetty be delighted?"

"Hetty?" I repeat, mechanically, something in her face, her voice, bringing it suddenly home to me that here I have made another terrible, gigantic *mistake*.

"It will be twice as pleasant with him at home," she goes on gaily; "and perhaps *you* will come down for a week's shooting? especially," she adds, "as Lady Florizel will be there."

"You will go now that *he has returned?*" I cry. (It is impossible, *impossible* that I should be mistaken)

"Why not?" she says, looking at me in wonder; "we are old friends—the best of friends—and I shall be *rejoiced* to see him once more. It was a great trouble to me when he went away," she goes on wistfully, "and I could never think how it was possible that you and he should find anything to quarrel about; but, perhaps, you did not, after all."

"You never guessed why he went?" I say quietly, "or knew of any reason why he should go?"

"No; never. Dick, Dick, *what* is it?"

She looks at me in wonder; truth is dawning on my eyes at last—truth that is even more terrible than the evil that I feared.

"Green Sleeves," I cry hoarsely, "if it is not Ullathorne that you have loved all these years, *who* is it?"

"*Ullathorne!*" The name leaves her lips in a cry of horror. For a moment, she faces me with a passion of outraged pride, of boundless amazement in her brown eyes; then she covers her face with her hands, but I see the burning colour leap into it like a flame.

"O!" she cries, "how could you have such a vile opinion

of him, and of me—he, the truest, best friend, who never dreamed, never *thought* of such a thing . . . Hetty's *husband*—and *I* . . . how could you breathe the same air with me if you thought me guilty of such a *crime* ? ”

I do not answer her ; I am stunned.

“ And, pray,” she cries passionately, “ did you tell *him* that I was in love with him ? Did you send him away because you were afraid that I should *make love* to him ? ”

And still I do not answer her.

“ If you did,” she says, “ it would be all the same ”—a rosy blush spreads over her face—“ for he knows the truth.”

“ What is the truth ? ” I cry ; “ for I will have it now, or never. Green Sleeves, is it *Anak* ? ”

The whirlwind in her face changes to a rainbow—the passion is swept away by a rueful smile, with a blush flitting through it.

“ O ! yes,” she says, and her very voice is like a bit of broken-up sunshine and weeping blended, “ of course—it is *Anak* ! ” and in a second has slipped passed me, and reached the door. But in a moment I have overtaken and caught her. For one fierce moment I snatch her to me, hungrily search her face, and find the truth, the whole truth in it ; then I let her go, . . . and she leaves me the poorest, the richest, the most miserable man upon whom a precious unsought gift of love was ever poured out.

CHAPTER XIII.

“ Yea, many there be that have run out of their wits for women ; many also have perished, have erred, and sinned for women.”

I CAME back to-night to find the house more silent than usual, and on my table there lay a letter.

“ Good-bye,” it says, “ and good-bye, and God bless you ! Think of your little Green Sleeves sometimes ; and if she can get over being too fond of *Anak*, *she will*,”

O! Green Sleeves, you would win a smile from tragedy itself—do you think to deceive me in this ridiculous fashion? And yet you have taken me in, and made me miserable on your account, besides losing me my best friend for the last four months; and now you possess the power to make me a hundredfold more wretched than I was before, on my own.

It is my last smile for many a long day, and is yielded up to thee, little one, for grim and dark closes in my life around me, blacker and blacker grow my thoughts now that the one gleam of light that brightened them is gone.

O! friend—friend, how have I wronged thee! . . . is it too late, even now, to make reparation?

In his letter he gave an address that for a week would find him. Before I go to my bed to-night—not to sleep, but to toss, and writhe, and turn in paroxysms of bitter memories—I have written to him.

At the end of three days, as I sit alone, at the lowest ebb of despair, at enmity with my God and self, I hear a step approaching that I should know. A moment later Ullathorne is before me. Life is not all bitterness that can give such a hand-clasp as this. As we stand face to face, that lump of stone that has stood to me for a heart for the past three days softens to flesh and blood. For one brief moment I ask myself what is the love of woman compared with friendship such as this?

Far on into the night we talk; and I know at last how, rather than betray Green Sleeves' secret, of which he had by accident become possessed, he had allowed me to think him guilty of the sin of winning her love.

"And you can keep *your* secret still," I say at parting; "you do not fear in daily and hourly companionship with her that you will reveal it?"

"I went abroad with the firm resolve to conquer that madness, and please God, I have done so. Hetty and I will turn over a new leaf"—he smiles faintly; "but anyway, as the

child never has guessed, so she never *shall* guess, the truth. I must not ask you to come to us, old fellow?"

I shake my head.

"There is only one circumstance on earth that could bring me to your house at pre sent."

"And if that should happen? From what you have told me I should say there was more than a chance."

"If it should happen—which it will not—you may expect me."

I am alone once more, but for my work. I throw myself into it madly, and envy the ploughman who, by arduous bodily labour during the day purchases that slumber at night which I, for all my toil, never obtain.

Pink May has gone to Devonshire on a visit; the boys are taking their summer holiday; the house in the evening is as silent as the grave.

"You're killing yourself, man," says Gilly, one day when I meet him, "and it's too soon. Wait till you've eaten your heart out as consulting man for twenty years, without earning bread and cheese, before you do that."

"Work never killed a man yet, Gilly."

"But worry slays its thousands," he mutters as he turns away, and to myself I add, "and drink its millions."

John James appears unexpectedly one day at hospital, and shakes his head at sight of me.

"Take a rest, Dick," he says; "a man can't enjoy success in his coffin."

"But he gets the very thing you are desiring me to seek," I say; and indeed in these days I vex my soul day and night with the old, old query that no one yet has been able to answer, "Is life worth living?"

One night, wakening from a fitful slumber, the first that has visited my eyes for many days, the shame, the ruin, the utter failure of my life suddenly rises up before me with such appalling force and truth that I shrink back, blinded as by a lightning

shaft from heaven. Breathless, aghast, I look on as the panorama of my life unfolds, and I see my actions, not as they have appeared in my own eyes, but as they *are*. I see myself as child, youth, and man, cursed by the arrogance that has ultimately wrecked me. I see myself pursuing the path of stubborn self-esteem, till suddenly assailed by a temptation that, in my pride, I had scorned to guard against, and that hurled me broken to earth. I see how from that fall I rose with undiminished pride, and again relying blindly on my own strength, rushed into a danger that any other man would have seen and avoided; and no immediate mischief bringing home to me this second mistake, I have been able vaingloriously to pursue my way till the third and crowning blunder is consummated.

Pride—always pride—that forbade my recognizing my fleshly failings, and so undid me. I see it all now, my life as it is, my life as it might have been, had I looked to my footsteps, had I known myself. I have borne myself as superior to all around me; I have laid down the law of virtue as austere as though I practised it to the uttermost; to Ullathorne I have displayed a severity that, with this new light on my conduct, strikes me as something grotesque; to Green Sleeves even I have been harsh to a degree that should have changed her affection for me into hatred.

I see it all now, and the punishment, against which I have lately rebelled so fiercely, seems to me now a consequence natural and just.

The night wears on, but before me this pitiful fellow, this thing of pride and folly, this windbag of self-sufficiency and virtue, struts to and fro; and when I have learnt him through and through, his every trick, his weakness, his vanity, till I sicken at the sight, and marvel that others have not sickened too, he dies, and a new Dick, every whit as foolish, as ignorant, and as miserable rises in his stead.

But none will ever call him proud again, or find him as harsh to their failings as to his own; none need fear from one who

has so justly earned his own contempt, a word that would seem to invest him with the right to despise others ; and if he again attain to self-respect, it will not be at the sacrifice of a fellow creature.

* * * * *

I woke but now out of such a slumber as has not visited my eyes since boyhood, to find the mid-day sun streaming into my chamber, while on the threshold there lay—a letter. It was sealed with black, and bore a foreign postmark. By the morrow's sun I am in Paris.

CHAPTER XIV.

“ He that dies pays all debts

“ ULLATHORNE says you are looking shockingly ill,” writes Hetty, “ and my advice to you is, come here for a month, get some shooting, settle affairs with Florizel, and decide once and for all to cut that *wretched profession*. I don't expect her for another few days, but, of course, you can come when you please. By the way, Siva is here ; he and Charolais are always together, but as yet nothing definite is *announced*.”

I found this letter awaiting me, with half-a-dozen others, on my return from Paris, a week ago, and it is not answered yet.

“ Eh ! ” cried Ariel, when she opened the door to me, “ is any of the family *dead*, sir ? ” and she pointed to my black hat-band and gloves.

I had forgotten that questions would be asked at home. . . .

“ A friend,” I answered, as I passed her by ; but my words rang false in my own ears, for something more and less than friend unto me was the dead thus outwardly mourned.

And within ? Within all is freedom and light. As yet no human throb of ecstasy ruffles the wings of that superb tranquillity on which I rest ; . . . when a man is taken off the rack, or released from some nameless torture, he does not

rejoice—he rests awhile in a content compared with whose boundless ocean joy is as a puny, babbling rill.

In these first days I do not think ; I do not take my new-found treasure in my hands, and look at it in this light, and that, or weigh it to see how much or how little of happiness it is worth to me. I am conscious only that the leper-stain is wiped from my soul ; that the mistake which might have made my life a maimed one to the end has been cancelled by the hand of death, and that I am free (O ! word of meaning to one whose fetters have eaten into his flesh), free as air.

Freedom ! O ! the taste of it between my lips. . . . I scarce dare to grasp it, to exult in it. . . . I put out my hand to touch it, trembling, and, with averted eyes, suffer not its full brightness to burst on me at once, lest it strike me blind.

But at the end of a week this clear, pure atmosphere has become second nature to me ; with that impulse of unrest that, deeply rooted in man's nature, ever impels him forward to unknown joys or ills, I cast behind me the calm of the gods, and feel stirring within me the hopes and fears of the mortal.

Hetty's letter, still unanswered, stares me in the face, and, as I read it for the second time, it comes upon me with a sudden, smart shock that I am free—to go to Florizel.

The time so passionately longed for, so profoundly despaired of, has come at last ; but that was *once*, and this is *now*.

She must be expecting me ; every day she must be expecting me ; yet for another week I thrust the thought from me. I say to myself that, after all these years, a little time more or less cannot signify ; that I have not sucked out half the sweetness of my freedom yet ; that I will enter into no new bondage, however gentle ; and, with guilty yearning, my heart turns towards that other impossible happiness that, were I without scruples, without honour, I might snatch at, and make my own.

Let me think : a clean, honourable life with a woman who will encourage, and bring forward the little that is good in me ; who will never bring the worse half of my nature into play, and,

consequently, cause it to starve and dwindle away—or a life purchased at the cost of another's misery; my own dishonour, of utter happiness, and self-pleasing?

I have forfeited my right to happiness—let it go; and *she*, she will soon forget, and some other man will, perhaps, make her happier than ever I could have done. Does some dim, unacknowledged hope float between this acquiescence in that which I desire not and my renunciation of that which I so passionately crave?

It is natural to us to deceive ourselves as we do others; so that, when at last I set out for Y——, it is with one avowed purpose only in my mind, while of the hope that runs beside it I am no more actively conscious than is the hurrying river of the flowers that border its banks, as it hurries on to lose itself in the sea.

* * * * *

"You have come too late," says Hetty, meeting me on the threshold; "Florizel left us yesterday; until this morning we had quite given up expecting you."

"There is some shooting left," says Ullathorne; "come and have a sherry and bitters before dinner, old fellow," and we go off together to his sanctum.

But when we have reached it, he puts his hands on my shoulders, and looks me in the face.

"Dick—free?"

"Thank God! *yes*."

"Don't be in a hurry to put on fresh shackles, old fellow; better be misunderstood than make a second mistake."

"She has been expecting me?"

"Yes; I fancy so."

"Ullathorne, where it is a question of honour—"

"But, perhaps, she has her notions of honour, too. Dick, I think I see happiness before you yet."

"Have Siva and Green Sleeves made up their minds?" I say, looking out of the window at the miles and miles of wooded country that stretch out beyond.

"They have agreed—to differ. He goes to-morrow, and I think is trying his luck for the last time to-day—look there."

I draw back, for at this moment the pair come slowly within sight. He is talking vehemently; she is swinging her hat by one string, her face is flushed, her lovely dark eyes are full of trouble.

"I tell you, Charolais, he *wishes* it," I hear him say as they approach; "there is nothing on earth that he desires so much."

"And do you expect me to marry you because *somebody else* wishes it?" she cries passionately, though I see how at his words she has gone pale as death. "When I marry—which will be *never*—it will be to please myself."

"O! Charolais!" he says ruefully, "you are a little Irish-woman, and the Irish change their minds very often; perhaps your never will be some day, after all."

She looks up, sees me, and into her brown eyes there flashes such a joy as dizzies me.

"Mr. Dick!"

"Green Sleeves!"

We see but one another, the lookers-on are forgotten; it is only when I turn to Siva a few moments later, that I become aware of the madness into which that cry, that look of hers, have hurried me.

He greets me mechanically; he is as a man who has suddenly awakened from a dream.

"What are you all doing here?" says Hetty, suddenly swooping down on us. "Come into the drawing-room every one of you, and make yourselves agreeable for the half-hour before the dressing-bell rings."

But three of us only obey her behests; Siva disappearing untill dinner is announced, and his fate, in the shape of a married flirt, is about making up her mind to walking down stairs without him.

CHAPTER XV.

"Green Sleeves, now farewell ! adieu !
God I pray to prosper thee !
For I am still thy lover true. . . ."

I LEFT the dancers behind me—eight couples in all—and came out on the terrace to think.

Through the open windows I see Green Sleeves in her

"Smock of silk both fair and white,
With gold embroider'd gorgeously,"

advancing and receding before Ullathorne in the Lancers, while Siva gloomily watches her, making no pretence at conversation with his partner.

Hetty is growing stout, and regularly dances for an hour every night before going to bed, setting her face against lounges in the billiard-room, or the yawns that inevitably come before bed-time in the drawing-room.

The dance over, one or two couples come to the window and look abroad, but the air is chill, there is no light without, save what comes through the open window ; they turn back, and I am left in solitude.

Once Ullathorne comes to look for me, but divining, perhaps, my wish to be alone, makes no great search, and goes in again.

It is barely ten o'clock yet. I see Hetty try to bring the smiles back to Siva's face ; he puts his arm round her waist, and they waltz off together, she talking eagerly to him the while. His face brightens. Where is the young lover who will not believe in hope before circumstance ?

A slender figure slips across the line that divides the light from the darkness, and comes straight towards me. I forget that she cannot see me, and marvel what impulse brings her thus willingly to my side.

She sits down scarcely a hand's breadth from me ; but,

before a certain fierce struggle within myself is over, Siva has crossed the window and is after her.

Perhaps this is a favourite haunt of both, for he comes unhesitatingly to where she is, and before I can move or acquaint them of my presence, he has dashed into vehement speech.

"Charolais," he cries, "I cannot see you, but I can feel the silk of your dress, and I know you are there. You shall hear me, for the last time, to-night, and if your answer is still the same, then I will go away ; and some day you will be sorry, for *I love you*, Charolais—and it is better to be satisfied with the love that you can win, than to eat your heart out for that which you cannot get."

"I am grateful for your love," she says gently, "but I do not want it—that is all."

"Charolais," he cries bitterly, "I have your secret now, and he does not love you ; his heart is bound up in Lady Florizel, after whom he came here to-day. And do you know that he follows her to-morrow ?"

"I know it."

"He has loved her always, Charolais ; he would have married her long ago but for an entanglement he got into abroad ; and I suppose that is at an end, as he has evidently come here with the avowed purpose of asking her to be his wife."

"Why do you tell me all this ?" she cries. "I have long known or guessed it ; and it is nothing to you—or to me."

"Nothing to you ?" he echoes ; "and do you not love him, Charolais ? can you deny that you *love* him ?"

"No," she says, in a very low voice, "it is no disgrace. You do not feel it a disgrace to love me, nor shall I ever feel it to be one that I have loved *him*. He does not know it," she goes on, with a sort of sob in her voice, "but even if he did, he is too noble to despise me for it."

"And what will you do, Charolais ?" he says sadly ; "re-

sign yourself to looking on always at their happiness? You are one of the family, they will cross your path at every step, and you will not have a chance of forgetting."

"No," she says, below her breath, "I shall not see their happiness. When I leave here it will not be to go home—" she ceases suddenly in her speech.

"Charolais," he cries suspiciously, "what is this that you think of doing? To go away from all who love you—to cast yourself alone on the world—is *that* what you propose?"

"No," she says, "it is to an old lady that I am going as companion, and she will take care of me; but, O!" she adds, "this is a great secret—to nobody in the world have I told it but you, and if you betray me I will never speak to you again as long as I live."

"So there is a chance of you speaking to me again?" he says eagerly. "No, I will not betray you, Charolais; but you will tell me where you are going?"

"O! Lord Siva," she says, laughing in spite of herself, "what would the old lady say?"

"Advise you to marry me," he says promptly. "After you've been married to me a year or so, you'll be just as fond of me as if you had married Dick."

"Should I?" she says, with an odd ring in her voice; "it would be an experiment. I don't think I'll try it."

"I won't give up hope yet," he says, with a sudden brightness in his voice. "You'll so soon get tired of that sort of life, Charolais, and I'll find you out, never fear, however you may think to hide yourself."

"Siva!" calls Ullathorne in the distance.

"Coming. I shan't go to-morrow, Charolais; I shall stay and see what you are going to do. You can't possibly go to that old lady's without escort you know."

She laughs as he goes away, but all at once it changes to bitter weeping. "Oh!" she cries, very low, "is my love *never* to be to me anything but a source of shame?"

"Green Sleeves!"

She starts up; I can almost hear her tremble; she stretches out her hand involuntarily, as though to search the darkness. I make it prisoner, and draw her down to my side.

"Green Sleeves," I say, "I have a story to tell you. Spare me five minutes in which to hear it."

Her name was wrung from me by that helpless cry of shame. I had meant to go away with the truth unspoken, but now it burns within my heart, and on my lips, and will not be quenched by scruples.

"Child," I say abruptly, "my tale is a short one; but when you have heard it, you will never need to be ashamed of your love again, save in bestowing it upon one so unworthy of the gift."

"It is a very old story," I say, after a pause; "it might be told without much variation of a hundred men as proud, as foolish, and as ignorant as he of whom I speak. He began life with some belief, considerable hope, and an honourable ambition, that, though difficult of attainment, might yet be reckoned within his reach. But, looking ever forward, not inward, cursed by a pride that made all that he did seem good in his own eyes, he knew no more of his own nature than of a stranger's; and when assailed by a temptation that he had never believed it possible could touch him, he fell before it, and was degraded in his own eyes for ever.

"You will not understand this part of the story. God grant that you never may. He fell in love with a woman who had not one single attraction for him that had not formerly in other women excited his contempt, who roused all that was worst in him, and for a time so completely trampled his better nature under foot, that she seemed to have called another man into existence, a man who, in that brief delirium of headlong passion, committed the crowning, the irreparable folly of—marrying her.

"His awakening was as rude as his fall had been sudden;

his passion had barely shrivelled to the ashes of disgust, when he became aware, from her own lips, of how, if he was conscious of having made a fatal mistake in marrying her, she had only, as the dupe of circumstances, been betrayed into the folly of marrying *him*.

"Before their marriage he had been puzzled by certain words dropped in her talk. A week afterwards she told him, playfully, that all disguises might as well now end, for she knew him to be, not the plain tutor as whom he had passed himself off, but the man of title with whom he was travelling ; and that though the Lord Burleigh conceit was a very pretty one, it was time it should come to an end, and she be installed in her rights.

"He thought her mad, till he found how the young fellow with whom he had been travelling had, indeed, for the sake of sport, convinced the girl and her mother that *he* was the tutor, though the other, from eccentric motives, desired to pass himself off as such ; and before the jester could undeceive them, or stay the joke from turning to bitter earnest, he was recalled to England by a summons to his father's death-bed.

"The man whose story I am telling you found the discovery of the woman's interested motives as nothing, compared with the consciousness of his own degradation. Her railings, when she found herself tied for life to one who could give her neither luxuries, wealth, nor position, her passionate regrets at the miserable market her splendid beauty had found, passed him by ; the condemnation of his own soul drowned all voices from without.

"He despised himself too profoundly to feel or express one spark of contempt for *her*. She wondered, at last, and grew still. Had he been a rich man, her love, such as it was, might have been given to him. As it was, she hated him for being what he was, and raised no objections when he told her he would provide for her living in Paris (where he had mar-

ried her) with her mother. And then he left her—she knowing nothing of him beyond his name—leaving a banker's address, under cover to whom she might write to him, if necessary.

"There had been another influence in this man's life, previous to his debasement—an influence so good and strong as almost to have touched love; and to this he now turned, as a man may from the lurid fires that have scorched and maimed him—to the clear, pure starlight of a world far above him. In those days this woman seemed to him the one woman on earth who could have made him happy; by contrast with that other, she became adorable. Had she possessed the power to awaken in him one throb of passion, he would have shunned her; but in that bright, clear atmosphere he gradually regained possession of his old self, and looked back on that fierce interregnum of passion as a dream.

"She soothed, cheered, *raised* him, little by little restored the man's self-respect, and set him on his feet again, and thus, knowing all the story—for he had no secrets from her—and for pure love, *for his sake*, set herself aside, and was content so long as she might serve him."

"God bless her," cries Green Sleeves, her hand tightening on mine; "it was noble—it was *grand* of her."

"He said to himself then, 'If ever it pleases God to lift this accursed yoke from my shoulders, I will seek this one pure, faithful woman, and by a life's devotion seek to repay her in some small measure for what she has done for *me*.' For to what might not the man have sunk—his self-esteem gone, his future destroyed at a blow—had not this woman stood by his side?

"And yet, when he left her, fortified and strengthened, to take his part in the battle of life, her goodness, her nobility had not made any stronger claim on his *heart* than two sweet brown eyes were able to scatter . . . hitherto the better half of his nature, then the worse half had been called into play,

but his heart had been reached by neither, and remained untouched.

"Something crept into it, and made fast its dwelling there—a something that had no name. Love has no name; he is *he*, and you are *you*; and one day he awoke to the knowledge that at length he *loved* one who satisfied his mind, soul, and fancy, yet from whom he was divided by circumstances as utterly as though she were dead. He was married to one woman, he was bound in honour to a second, and the woman he loved had no love to give him—or so he thought then; but later, when about to send her away from him, he discovered that the love he had believed she had given to another was *his*, had been his from the beginning.

"What should he do with this gift—so sweet and precious, that he dared not take? In the midst of the wild tumult of joy, despair, longing, and renunciation that raged in his breast, came news that almost struck him blind in the reading—his wife had died suddenly, and he was—free.

"Free . . . to go to the woman he loved? No, honour and gratitude alike pointed to the woman who had been his good angel; who had saved him from himself, and who—loved him.

"Tell me, Green Sleeves," I cry, "could he do any other? could he make her so base a return after all those years as to discard her now that he had a chance of proving his gratitude?"

"No," cries Green Sleeves, swiftly, "his honour compelled him; he would be unworthy of any woman's love if he could abandon one who had so nobly stood by him, and—and I think he could not choose but be happy with such a woman as that, and . . . in time he would forget the other."

"And that is all the story. Child, do you think *she* would ever forget?"

"Never."

She has risen. As she stands beside me, I can smell the

roses she wears in her bosom . . . a mad, wild yearning overcomes me, and suddenly winding my arms around her, draw the little face, all wet with tears, down to mine.

"Kiss me once, Green Sleeves, my heart, for the first, last time," I cry hoarsely; and with a sob she lays her arms about my neck, for a second, a little velvet mouth falls soft as a flower on my lips, then she has torn herself out of my arms; I am alone.

CHAPTER XVI.

"Freeze, freeze, thou bitter sky,
That dost not bite so nigh
As benefits forgot:
Though thou the waters warp,
Thy sting is not so sharp
As friend remember'd not."

I HAVE given Florizel no warning of my coming. When I reach the castle, after traversing the half-dozen miles of park by which it is surrounded, on foot (for I wanted to think, to find words somewhat less bold than the

"Madam, I am come to woo,
Marriage I must have of you"

of the old ballad, in which to make my suit), I find her not at home.

"I think her ladyship is somewhere in the Home Park, sir," says the butler; and thither I go in search of her.

Who could walk through such a scene as this, and believe Feuerbach's wretched theory, that God exists only in our own minds? Mohammed's thoughts sped truer when, in answer to those who besought him to perform miracles, he pointed to those never ending ones wrought by an unseen hand—the royal progress of the seasons, the constant renewal of life that no human hand has ever accomplished; and Confucius went fur-

ther when, entreated by a foolish disciple to speak something that might be written down, he exclaimed, "Does heaven speak? The four seasons pursue their courses, and all things are continually being produced; but does heaven say anything?"

The meanest herb finds a place in that "sum of things for ever speaking" that is the immortal vocabulary of God, and while we have His bow in the heavens, His presence in the storm, we ask no words uttered in the language of mortals.

How lovely, how vast are the solitudes through which I pass on my way to Florizel! Sieviking shrivels to a handful of dust beside this magnificent stretch of land, and beneath these giant trees there is almost the same sensation of loneliness, of freedom, as one experiences on a boundless seashore.

By merest chance I come upon her at last, sitting under a tree; and the grass telling no tales, I have time to note her weary air, her pallor, as with listless eyes she looks out at the lands that call her mistress.

Perhaps my life will not have been all a mistake, if in it I can bring happiness to one human being . . . my own wretchedness grows less when I see the colour that leaps to her cheek, as I reach her side.

"Dick!" she cries, starting up, and then my face telling her on what errand I have come, she grows paler than at first, and asks question after question about the Ullathornes and those at home.

But I put all her questions by, only desiring to place myself beyond the reach of that wild and desperate longing that burns like fever in my veins, and, taking her hand in mine, prefer my suit in language plain as ever man used yet.

"Florizel, will you be my wife?"

"No, Dick—never."

For a moment I look at her, stunned—beyond her, heaven's gate seems to open, and I to have no power to look within it; then the vision fades, and I see only in the brave face

before me a renunciation stronger even than the love in its every line.

"O! Dick," she cries, with quivering lips, "had you so mean an opinion of me as to think I should say *yes*?"

"I would have tried to make you happy, Florizel," I cry; "with all my heart and soul I would have tried—and are you sure that I should not have succeeded?"

"And do you think," she says sadly, "that I, whom you have had no cause to think of save with liking, would stoop to become an object of effort, of disgust to you? Be to you simply the obstacle who came between you and your life's happiness? I love you too well, I value your liking for me too well, to sink to that. . . ."

"Florizel," I cry, struck to the very soul by her words, "what is there in such a wretch as I to win from you such a love as this? Madman, fool that I was not to be able to return it in kind. . . ."

"Dick," she says quickly, "do not praise me overmuch, for I have not conquered myself without many a fall and stumble—I have been jealous of your Green Sleeves, I have hated her; and when you wrote me the news of your wife's death, and I knew the happiness that was in store for *her*"—she covers her face with her hands—"if you had seen me then, Dick, you would never have thought me *good* again."

"You will always be the best, the noblest woman on earth to me," I cry, forgetting how but last night Green Sleeves said "Go," when, had she said "Stay," I might have forfeited honour to win her.

We are moving towards the castle now; all at once Florizel turns to me, laughter and tears struggling for the mastery in her grey eyes.

"O! Dick, what will Bell and Hetty say?"

I do not answer her; I can think neither of them nor Green Sleeves at this moment, Florizel herself fills all my thoughts.

"Poor little Charolais," she says, "I am afraid she will

have rather a bad time of it with them when you go back to claim her."

"I shall not go—yet," I say. "O! Florizel, how can you think it possible?"

"I wonder how long it will be before you are hungry for a sight of those brown eyes?" she says, a little bitterly; "don't, Dick, sing my virtues to her, or she will hate me, and I want to be friends with the child, else I shall never see you, and I won't give up our friendship for any wife or sweetheart living."

"You don't know her, Florizel, indeed; and when she owes her life's happiness to you, how can she help loving you?"

"I do not want her love," cries Florizel, hastily. "I beg your pardon, but you don't understand woman; Charolais and I will never *love* one another, but we may be good friends for all that, Dick."

"I hope so."

"You are quite sure *she* is really dead?"

"Quite sure."

"You saw her?"

"No, she had been buried the day before I arrived in Paris. I saw the doctor, and received the certificate of death."

"And the mother?"

"I pitied her . . . she seemed stupefied by grief."

We have reached the entrance to the castle, above which the dragon, emblem of the powerful family of Fitzalan, rears his head, and I pause beneath him to say farewell to the last descendant of the ancient house.

"You are going back to Y—to-night?" she says, colouring.

"No, to the inn to-night. To-morrow—"

"To-morrow," she says, with a sudden change in her voice; "come here—to dinner. Will you promise?"

"May I not come up in the morning?"

"No; you shall have a day's shooting. I will send the head gamekeeper round to you first thing."

"I shall shoot myself," I say, puzzled at her commands ; I have not handled a gun for years, and—"

"There, good-bye," she says, giving me her hand ; "I dine at eight, but if you like you may come at seven—if you have not shot yourself meantime in mistake for a partridge."

* * * * *

"Lady Florizel's compliments, sir," says the butler, as he takes my hat from me, "and she is sorry she will not be able to see you till dinner-time, but she is particularly engaged. And will you mind waiting for her in the White Drawing-room?"

He leads the way, and I follow him through half-a-dozen rooms, thinking how lonely poor Florizel must be in the midst of all this splendour, and find myself at last in a room smaller than the rest, in which he leaves me.

But the room is tenanted already—some one is sitting with her back to me in a big arm-chair drawn close to the window—some one whose little dark head somehow puts me in mind of Green Sleeves, and as I advance this somebody turns, and I see her, my love, my dear ; and in another moment her heart is beating against mine, and for weal and woe my Lady Green Sleeves is my very own at last.

Book IV.

CHAPTER I.

"O ! row my lady in satin and silk,
 Bowing down, bowing down,
 And wash my son in the morning milk !
 And aye the birks a' bowing."

HAVE you ever watched a young mother go upstairs to her baby? The first few steps she goes sedately, then her pace quickens, then, when she hears his voice in the distance, she begins to run, finally she arrives full gallop, but with all her speed her heart has outrun her body, and in imagination she has caught him in her arms long before she has reached him. And then she hugs him all up together to her breast, as though she held all the world—so little, so great—in that tender compass; and I don't believe any love of man, with its mingled bitter and its sweet, touches so divine a rapture as this.

Myself unseen, I have been watching such a pantomime, and now I stand back to see my Lady Green Sleeves, and her boy, come dancing down the shallow oaken stairs—he perched astride on her shoulders, with the little yellow head,

"Running over with curls,"

surmounting her dark one, his dimpled arms held aloft by her either hand, while he is talking to her in that tender child-language that surely is the purest note in the whole gamut of earthly sound.

I lie in wait for the pair, and as they come by, I snatch

them to my heart, but quick as a sunbeam Green Sleeves has escaped me, and is through the open window before the touch of her has well left my fingers.

I catch them between two of the long poplar shadows that lie across the lawn.

"O! Green Sleeves," I cry, "I never would have brought you here, if I had known you would get so outrageously saucy!"

"I am so happy," she says, rubbing her forehead against my cheek, "and I think it gets up into my head—do you know I was strongly tempted to turn a somersault over a haycock to-day when the Squiffer did! And I don't think it would have mattered much if I *had*, for all the haymakers are firmly convinced that Pink May is your wife, not me."

"Dear old soul," I say, laughing, and looking across to where, in a distant field, an umbrella attests to the care our aunt still takes of her complexion; "but indeed, Green Sleeves, such conduct as running races with the boys, and arriving out of breath to receive visitors, climbing trees of a Sunday afternoon, and going to church with a big strawberry stain on your white gown, is *not* becoming behaviour in a young matron."

"O!" says Green Sleeves, who has put her treasure down on the grass, and is thus able to give me a divided attention, "it is all very fine for you to talk—you see you are getting old, Dick, but *we* are young."

"Mrs. Sieviking," I say gravely, "I will buy you a book that will teach you your duty to your husband. And to think that you were once a modest, obliging, well-behaved little creature, who called me 'Mister!'"

"That was before I found you out," she says, nodding. "It does alter one's opinion of a person wonderfully—to marry him!"

"Green Sleeves, after all, I don't believe you love me, particularly."

"No ; I have got so used to you. After all, 'a bird in the bush is worth two in the hand.' . . . I love you dearly when you are away from me. O ! Dick, isn't he *beautiful* ? And not in the least like me," she adds proudly, as her bright-eyed boy pulls himself up to her knee, and drums upon it with his little fat hands.

"He is certainly the first man child of any consequence that was ever born," I say gravely, "though there may have been one or two mothers who thought differently."

"There *couldn't* have been one like this," she says ineffably, "and you may kiss him, if you like, Dick."

"I wonder why, for the first three or four years of a child's life, his mother is everything, his father simply a contemptible person ?" I say, not availing myself of her gracious permission.

"Because he *is*," says Green Sleeves, picking up her treasure with an air of dignity ; and how you ever came to be the father of such a little *angel*, I'm sure I can't imagine ; and mother will kiss you, if he won't ;" and then there is such a piece of fooling between this pretty pair as might go on for ever, did she not, as an after-thought, remember me, and give me a kiss—only one, but given so sweetly, with a tender arm round my neck, and one of those rare looks from her brown eyes that tell me how, for all that she seems wrapped up in the child, the first place in her heart is yet mine.

"Dick," she says softly, as he struggles down again to the grass at our feet, "don't you think we are almost too happy—do you think it will last ?"

Her question startles me . . . I had thought her to have forgotten, she has seemed so careless in her happiness . . . and God is merciful in that He makes the memory of joy so infinitely keener than that of pain, we are able to count up our joys, and thread them as pearls on the string of memory, so that not one of them be lost ; but who recalls as vividly the heart-thrusts of which he has bled ?

"What has put that idea into your head?" I say quickly.

"Because I'm growing too *used* to being happy. I'm not grateful enough, but take it all as a matter of course, and I've noticed people always get a good waking up, and *humbling* when they're like that."

"We shall have a terrific quarrel, Green Sleeves," I say jestingly, "and part for ever—to rush into each other's arms half-an-hour afterwards."

"Or you will discover, some day, that you made a mistake, and that Lady Florizel would have suited you much better than I do."

"Of one thing I am very certain," I say, pinching her cheek; "that she would never have preferred a little urchin like *that* to her lord and master."

"I don't think that I prefer him, really," says Green Sleeves meditatively; "but, to tell you a secret, it *is* a struggle, sometimes, to know which of you to say first in my prayers."

"And supposing you had to choose between us, Green Sleeves, what then?"

She snatches the boy to her heart, looks at him, at me.

"O! Dick," she says; "he is *you*, you know!"

"A year ago," I say jealously, "you could not have borne for me to leave you for days together, as I do now. You would have been restless and miserable, till I was at your side again; but *now*—"

"Then," she says, looking round at the poplar-shaded lawn, the veritable thickets of roses that lavish their perfume on the air in a thousand subtle scents, "we had not Sieviking!"

For this is Sieviking, and it is mine. Mine, while I am yet young, and able to enjoy it; mine without long toil and labour, yet none the less sweet to me for that. When one is happy, one takes all good gifts naturally, not fighting against them; and this gift of Sieviking, dropped unexpectedly by Fortune into my lap, is the very crown and completion of my content.

A year ago, Mr. Menzies' health suddenly failed; he was

ordered abroad indefinitely, and Sieviking once more came into the market.

It was instantly bought (though by whom we could not ascertain), but never occupied; and when, two months ago, I received a letter informing me that by the death of my godfather in Calcutta I was entitled to fifteen thousand pounds, it was surely an odd coincidence that, almost simultaneously, a London agent should inform me how he was instructed to offer Sieviking for sale by private contract, at little more than half the sum for which we had sold it.

Perhaps it was a mad thing to do, for I was a poor man yet, with means quite inadequate to keeping up the place properly; but I could not resist the temptation, and the close confined London life was telling on Green Sleeves and the child, or so I thought; and, one day, with a vague delirious wonder, I found myself beneath the very tree where I had sworn to win the old home back, and knew, that though not earned by the sweat of my brow, it was yet, by no dishonourable means, *mine*.

The first rapture of possession has not left me yet. I can still hail as a new discovery each old, well-remembered haunt, and renew my youth in a tree with a broken bough here, in initials cut deep in the bark there; the very flower-beds, with their unaltered shapes, steal on my sight as memories over the heart of a dreamer, and lull me to a happy repose.

The house, too, is almost unchanged; the furniture is as we left it, and the school-room, to which we have restored the battered old relics we had removed to town, looks as though not a day had passed since we bade it farewell.

Already many of the old voices have echoed through it; the boys have raced and torn hither and thither, intoxicated with joy. Jill has been down for a couple of weeks, and comes again shortly; the Ullathornes are coming in a month's time for a few days. Of Anak's return there is at present no chance. Now that there is real work to do, he is not likely to desert his post; but we look to having him back safe and sound,

some day. And Florizel is coming by-and-by. Over the perfections of her godson, she and Green Sleeves have become warm friends. For the present, my own life must be pretty equally divided between town and country ; but, in less than a year, I look to settling down here for good, in the modest character of apothecary to my own village.

"Here are the spoons," cries the Squiffer, bursting round a corner on us ; "why, we've been looking for you everywhere ; Pink May has got tea all ready in the hay-field, and kissing will keep, but strawberries and cream *wont*."

CHAPTER II.

"O gentle wind that bloweth south
From where my love repaireth,
Convey a kiss from *her* dear mouth,
And tell me how *she* fareth."

I LEFT home so early this morning that I would not waken my wife, who lay with her boy in her arms in the midst of the dancing lights and shadows, with the first morning song of the birds without, woven through them, and all day I have kept that picture in my mind, and with my thoughts I have followed her through every hour.

Now she will be in the garden among the roses, anon in the hay-field with the boys ; the strawberry beds are certain of her presence early in the afternoon, and at nightfall, when her child sleeps, I know that all her heart will be with me.

Blow, o' west wind, blow. Blow to my darling all tender thoughts, all passionate desires ; whisper in her ear each secret of my heart, and bring me to her memory in the scent of every flower she touches, with every breath she draws, nor let me lapse one moment longer out of her thoughts than I permit her to escape out of mine. I am always restless away from her, but to-night my unrest has an element of fear in it, as though

some one sought to snatch my treasure from me, and once I awoken struggling desperately with some unknown adversary, whose features seem to resolve themselves into those of Ullathorne.

I rise unrefreshed at daybreak, and can settle to nothing till the morning post comes in and brings me a letter.

It holds great news—the child has cut a tooth, the Chancellor of the Exchequer has called and been sent empty away, the strawberries are nearly over, and she loves me dearly, dearly, *dearly*.

It is not often that she gives me so generous a peep into her heart . . . with Green Sleeves there always seems a little more to give, a little more to be won; perhaps she fears to tell me all, lest she should be left with nothing more to tell.

And do I love her? I thought I loved her when our lives seemed divided for ever, and again I thought I could love her no better when she had been a year my wife, but now I can look back on those days, and say that it was not love compared with the passionate tenderness I feel for her now.

Our love has been often

“ Ruffled by those cataracts and breaks,
That humour interposed too often makes.”

Green Sleeves has a temper, and so have I, and more than once she has announced, in tones of the deepest conviction, that she is perfectly certain she will some day *hate* me, but we have borne each other no malice for the bitter words spoken in our haste, and hitherto have utterly sufficed to one another.

And this, I take it, is the true essence of love, for two people to find in each other that which the whole world beside does not furnish to them: to see faults, to be angry with themselves for loving so desperately that which they know to come so short of their ideal, and yet not even to wish them to be different.

Florizel's perfections would probably sit very ill on Green Sleeves' charms, but where one loves, a virtue is as likely to be

found hiding in a dimple as exercising itself laboriously in daily practice, while a trick of manner secures to its owner the consideration only purchased by another at painful self-sacrifice.

It is curious that women should feel so much more generously to an unworthy rival than a noble one. I think Green Sleeves has even now scarcely got over her jealousy of Florizel, and that the splendid conduct of the latter aroused in her a profound admiration that accentuated this feeling. Explain the riddle, ye women, if you can.

Nevertheless it is to Florizel, with my thoughts full of Green Sleeves, that, my day's work done, I am now on my way, and it is with a feeling of sharp disappointment that, on reaching her door, I am told she is out of town, and does not return till to-morrow.

I am in one of those moods when a man longs for the society of some one in whose society he finds pleasure—when, like David, his spirit needs to be soothed into rest, and when, if no one is by to calm him, he is likely to be hurried into some scene of excitement or folly that at any other time he would abhor.

There is a fever in my veins that grows with every hour; were I superstitious, I should say that some baleful influence was upon me, that some great evil menaced me to night, and the feeling at last becomes so strong that I go to a telegraph office, and send a message to Pink May, asking if all are safe and well at Sieviking.

I wait for the answer, and cannot forbear a smile when I receive it. "All is Well." The capital W almost restores my spirits; I eat my solitary dinner with moderate appetite, and go back to my books with the intention of doing a hard evening's work.

But the mischief in my blood will not be exorcised thus. Severe bodily exertion that tired me out might quiet me; I shut my book, and go forth into the night.

How different this to that one twenty-four hours ago, of which the star-spangled canopy above was but one of the many beau-

tiful portions that went to make up that whole which we call night when the sense of scent, the sense of hearing, and the still more perfect consciousness of the veiled beauty around, made the hour one of unutterable sweetness and rest.

May that instinct which carries our bodies to an accustomed haunt while our minds are far away, be supposed to dwell in the feet or in the memory? Wherever it may locate itself, it guides me to the Ullathornes' door, plants me on the doorstep, and even rings the bell for me before I am at all aware of the liberty one half of myself is taking with the other.

"My master is in Paris, sir; my mistress is dining out," says the butler, in answer to my inquiries. I do not know, as I turn away, how, if my sister had chanced to be at home to-night, Fate might yet have passed me by, or at any rate have permitted to me a few more months or years of happiness.

With my restlessness still unsubdued, I pursue my way, and presently come to the open doors of a theatre, whence a few people are issuing—a great many going in.

Obeying a sudden impulse, I enter, and ask for a ticket; perhaps this mimic show will fix my attention, and distract my thoughts from myself.

The man looks up carelessly.

"Every seat is taken."

A sudden rage fires me. Am I to fail in setting my foot in every place to which I have sought to gain entrance to-night?

A shabby-looking man comes hurrying up, and holds out his ticket—a dress-circle one—to be checked.

"The piece is three-quarters done," he mutters; "but better late than never."

I follow, and touch him on the shoulder.

"I will give you a guinea for that ticket," I say, and I hold out my hand with the money in it.

He looks at it longingly, then shakes his head.

"I daren't," he says; "I'm courting her, and she's got a

temper—she'd never forgive me if I didn't turn up ; and there's another young man as has got her ear at this very moment."

And he stumps down the passage, and out of sight.

Once more I go out into the streets, at length to meet the fate that three times over to-night I have unconsciously tried to elude.

CHAPTER III.

" Out, out, damned spot ! "

I CAME home unexpectedly to-night, and meeting no one by the way, gained the parlour, and dared to breathe.

The room was empty, but on the leather chair by the fire-place were set out in great state two shabby little shoes. How came they there so orderly ? As I look down on them, a ripple of laughter from the garden without sends a shiver through me, and past the open window flits Green Sleeves, with her boy on her shoulder, talking to him, as she comes, of *me*.

" Where are his shoes ? " I hear her say, as she crosses the hall, and I shrink back into the shadow as the parlour door is pushed open, and she comes in. Her eyes are dazzled by the sunshine without ; the child perceives me first, and, holding out his arms, cries, " Papa ! papa ! " I see her face turn rosy red, a warm love-light leaps into the brown eyes ; she is at my side in a moment, but not in my arms ; it is only by a supreme effort of will that I contrive to say,—

" You see I have come home earlier than usual, Green Sleeves."

" You are ill ? " she cries quickly, as she puts down the child. She leads me to the arm-chair, and draws me down to it. " Oh ! Dick, your head is so hot "—she lays a cool little hand on it—" and you are so pale. I think you must have had a slight sun-stroke, darling."

"Yes, a stroke," I say, leaning my forehead against her bosom. "Send the child away, Green Sleeves ; I want you, only you."

When he has gone, I take her in my arms. Some of the raging fever in brow and heart is stilled, as I hold her thus. We are alive ; we are together. Thought refuses to travel farther, and shame holds back the goad with which but now he stabbed me through and through.

Looking up, I see in a distant glass our two heads reflected. Thank God that hers is pressed downwards, and that she cannot see mine. To-morrow she will wonder, perhaps, how so much grey comes to be mingled with its yellow ; but, to-night—yes, to-night, she shall see no change.

"It has seemed such a long week," she says gently ; "I think I will go back with you on Monday. After all, Sieviking is not *you*."

"No ; you must stay here. Green Sleeves, we have been happy?"

"Yes."

"We have quarrelled sometimes ; we have been jealous ; but we have *loved* one another?"

"We have ; we *do*," she cries, clinging to me with a kind of fear. "And shall we not *always*, Dick?"

"Bad tempered, conceited, selfish, yet he has loved you, Green Sleeves ; he has *loved* you,—whatever may come after, always remember that."

I strain her in my arms so fiercely that she has no breath, only a kiss with which to answer me—a kiss to which my lips make no more response than if they had been of wood.

I set her down, I take her face fast between my two hands, and read its every line ; then I put her from me resolutely, and she stands alone.

"Do not come with me, little one," I say ; "I am going for a walk, and I may be late ; don't even wait supper for me."

I go out into the garden, and she does not follow me. I am free to enjoy the charms of such a night as that of which I

was thinking something close on a week ago in town. Here are all the spots in which I took so keen a delight as being mine—and they are mine still. O! thank God that the guilt of the hand that holds them, has not power to wither one green leaf, or wipe out one wavering line of beauty; that Nature reflects but our happy moods, not our miserable ones.

It is quite dark when at length I stand beneath the tree where I made my boyish vow, and thought life could give me no greater joy than the possession of the old home. To-night I can look back to that day, and reckon that lad supremely happy, compared with the man who stands beneath its boughs to-night. For he suffered without sin; but this poor wretch has taken home guilt to his bosom, deception to his tongue, and must henceforth act, speak, and look, an incarnate Lie, than which there is nothing more hateful upon God's earth.

The tragedy has but just commenced; there is time yet in which to tear off the mask, to speak the truth; and, though hurled out of my Paradise, to know myself *honest*, save for one slip. Shall I go into the peaceful rooms of yonder home, and, blaring out my secret, bid happiness begone, and call upon all that I love best to arise and curse me?

As a thief who each moment dreads to find an eye turned upon him, I approach the lighted window, and, merged in the darkness without, look within.

The table is spread for the evening meal; all the simple delicacies preferred by the master of the house set out with a care that speaks of loving memory and thought.

Pink May nodding over her knitting in a corner; the boys casting wistful glances at the clock, and trying to rouse my Lady Green Sleeves, who sits in the easy chair, pale, with something in her face that irresistibly brings to my mind those days in Picotee Lane when we loved one another by stealth, believing our lives to be for ever divided.

I think she has changed her gown, and I am sure she had not a ribbon in her hair when I came home. . . .

Little wife, little mother, with whom the most sacred memories of life are entwined, shall I leave thee now before my sin has degraded thee, or by flowery paths pursue my miserable road to dishonour?

The question is undecided when I enter the room abruptly, and, dazzled by the light, shrink from it, and cover up my eyes.

That moment decides my fate.

Green Sleeves comes to my side, puts her tender arms about me, as though in support, and leads me to a seat.

"Poor old boy," says Solomon; "he's knocked up by the heat, and no wonder—I nearly got a stroke over that last load of hay myself; but there's nothing better for anything of that sort than a good supper."

"Dear boy," says Pink May, "if *only* you would recollect to put a cabbage leaf in your hat every day."

I rouse myself with a violent effort, and lead Green Sleeves to the table.

"I see you have my favourite dish for me, aunt," I say, as we sit down, and I take a little on my plate, and make a pretence of eating it.

"Dick's off his feed," says the Squiffer, "and no wonder—after a week of it in town. Now I shouldn't wonder," he goes on gloomily, "if desk work doesn't make *me* consumptive after a bit, and compel me to get country employment. Couldn't you take me on as bailiff, Dick?"

"I might—if I went away. Green Sleeves, would you like to go abroad for some months, and at once?"

"Would *you* like to go, dear?" she says, looking startled; "if so, of course I would—and baby, too," she adds.

"No," I say irritably, "we couldn't take the child; we should be moving from place to place all the time."

"Don't you worry, Charolais," says the Squiffer, eyeing me wrathfully; "*we'll* take care of him if you go; he's very fond of Solomon and me, you know."

"Will you come with me without him?" I say, the misery in my heart making my voice harsh and bitter.

"Yes—if you wish it."

"No," I cry, smoothing her pretty head, "I will not separate you; it is all talk, child, and probably no one will go."

"Why should you," says Solomon, "just as you've got back to the old place, and with the Ullathornes coming in a fortnight too, and Jill later on?"

"They must not come," I exclaim involuntarily; "they must be put off."

"Well!" says the Squiffer with open eyes, "I didn't know you were so inhospitable, Dick! What did you ask them for if you didn't want them?"

"Aunt Theodosia called to-day," says Solomon. "Said she understood all the family were here, and politely wondered how we managed to feed them. Charolais, the Squiffer, and I happened to be running a race, and making a rather considerable noise. From the description we thought it must be the Chancellor—for we came in from the garden side of the house—and burst in on her in a row."

He goes off in a loud explosion, in which the Squiffer joins, then proceeds again,—

"She saluted us boys in a majestic manner, and then, pointing at Charolais, asked who that child was.

"'This is Mrs. Sieviking, ma'am, of Sieviking Court,' I said, leading her forward, and I thought the old woman would have had a fit."

"Charolais had been trying to climb a tree," says Solomon, gravely, "and her hair never *will* lie flat, you know. Aunt Theodosia sat down on the Esterhazy brown, and gasped.

"She asked Charolais what fortune she had brought you!" says the Squiffer, attacking the cheese, "and I told her you had followed the old recipe for getting a good wife, viz., to look out for one whose dowry consisted solely of clean linen and strict virtue, whereupon she said that though she had

always known you *looked* a fool, that was another matter to proving yourself one."

"And I said," puts in the Squiffer, "that you had always been afraid of showing all your wit in her company for fear of catching her reflection."

"She went away in a rage at that," says Solomon, " remarking as she went, that she had never thought to see Sieviking Court given over to a parcel of school-boys and school-girls, with a popinjay to keep order."

"Popinjay, indeed!" says Pink May, drawing herself up; "all jealousy, my dears,—some people prefer popinjays—to parrots."

We gather round the window; Green Sleeves brings my pipe, fills it, and sits as usual on my knee . . . it is outwardly just such an evening as many other peaceful ones passed by us here, and the boys' garrulous talk flows on till midnight.

But for me there is no sleep, no rest; all night I wander over hill and dale, and daybreak finds me many miles from Sieviking; it is not till the place is awake that I return to it, and go upstairs."

The nursery door is open—but the mother is not there, the nurse, too, is absent, and the child all alone is standing up in his cot, looking like a little bird caught in its netting as he swings himself too and fro. I see his blue eyes peeping at me through the interstices, and approaching, as God knows I had had no thought of doing, he holds up his innocent lips to me, and as I stoop, his solemn wondering look, as though he knew something were amiss, seems to pierce to my very soul, and bring to light the secret hidden there.

CHAPTER IV.

“ And when ye walk in the kirk-yard,
And in your dress are seen,
There is nae lady that sees your face,
But wishes your grave were green.”

“ No, ma'am,” says Suzel, entering, “ I can *not* find Master Dick’s shoes anywhere, but they were nearly worn out, and—”

She stops short at sight of me, and drops an amazed courtesy.

“ Where is your mistress ? ” I inquire as I pass out.

“ I think she must be in the garden, sir, but I left her here a few moments ago.”

I could tell the girl where those shoes are if I pleased, but they are shabby, they are old, they would soon be cast aside, and I—want them. The windows of our room are flung wide open, the peaceful, happy room in which she took such pride, and that is as white and pure as her own heart, and I the only blot in it.

Here are her favourite books, her little treasures, my likeness hung above her desk, another of her boy by my side, all the precious odds and ends of a young life whose possessions, save of love, have never been very valuable.

“ You see, Dick,” she said to me, when it was all done, and she had led me up with triumph to see it, “ this is *home*, and where I put the things they’ll stop, unless we lose Sieviking a second time.”

But did you ever think, my Green Sleeves, how perhaps you might lose *Dick* ?

I throw myself down on the cushions of the low window sill, and groan aloud.

“ Dick’s lazy,” I hear the Squiffer say below my window, “ let’s wake him up.” And a guelder rose, heavy with dew, flies through the window and falls at my feet.

"He seemed out of sorts last night. I wonder if anything's bothering him?"

"Who or what is there that *can*?" says Solomon, who is apparently eating strawberries: "he's got Charolais, and Sieving, and the youngster, a profession that suits him down to the ground, and enough money to live on comfortably, with youth and health to enjoy all the lot. Why, he hasn't a thing left to wish for on earth—he's been lucky in *everything*—I just wish I could change places with him, that's all."

Their voices recede, and at the same moment I hear that of Pink May approach.

"No, indeed, dear Charolais, you are not looking yourself this morning. Dick, too—he struck me as quite *odd* last night."

"The heat has tried him," says a dull, mechanical voice, that I hardly recognize; "we will not wait breakfast for him any longer, auntie; perhaps he will prefer to rest another hour or two."

"And he always such an early riser, too," says Pink May as they enter the house, "and just for want of a cabbage-leaf in his hat, I do believe!"

I did not expect Green Sleeves to seek me. I can understand the sensitive pride that forbids her doing so; moreover, she is one of those rare women in whom is not that invincible bias towards following anything that walks off in an opposite direction, that seems implanted like an instinct in the average female breast.

Since our marriage the courtship has been all on my side; but then I have been *happy*, there has been nothing in me to call forth that self-sacrificing tenderness which any woman worthy of the name feels when the eager triumphant lover is transformed as now into the suffering dependent; all her pretty pomps and sovereignties, those dear supremacies of love by which I know her to set such store, will she cast them aside as baubles to remember only that I suffer, and that she loves me?

I pull myself together, suddenly aware of how my feet are tripping and stumbling on that path which, once having sworn to tread, I had thought I should find easy. Unless I wish all to know that which I would give my life to hide, I must lay down some fixed rules for my conduct, and abide by them, no matter how flesh and blood rebel, no matter that at every turn becomes deeper sunk in deceit the soul that, however unworthy, was once honest.

"Here's Dick at last!" says the Squiffer, as ten minutes later I enter the parlour where they sit at breakfast.

"Dear boy," says aunt, standing on tiptoe, "you don't look much the better for your night's rest."

I may kiss *her* without a pang. I do so with all my heart, but to Green Sleeves I only give a touch on the shoulder as I pass.

"It's nearly ten o'clock," says Solomon; "but there's lots of time for church. Charolais has got a new bonnet, an offering to the prejudices of the congregation, who like married ladies to look *elderly*."

"I did not think it would suit you, my dear, this morning," says Pink May, "but now that you have got such a nice colour, it will be just your style."

I look up—yes, she has indeed a beautiful colour, but her eyes do not meet mine, and though she busies herself with my wants, it is without a word.

"Are you going to church, Dick?" says the Squiffer, coming in half-an-hour later, with Green Sleeves' parasol and prayer-book in his hand, himself clad in irreproachable broadcloth. "I hope so, because it looks more *respectable* to see the head of the family in his place, you know."

"And Pink May's best gown is a *one-er*," says Solomon, appreciatively, "five hundred and fifty steel buttons on the skirt alone, and they all clank as she walks up the aisle, every one."

"Not going to church, dear boy?" says that lady, entering "what will Charolais say—and her new bonnet and all?"

I go upstairs, and find her standing before her glass, her hands absolutely idle, lost in thought.

"Green Sleeves," I say, "are you ready?"

She starts violently, and then feigns to be searching for her gloves.

"Are you not coming?" she says.

"No. Here are your gloves."

"Thank you."

We go down-stairs together, and I stand at the door to see them depart.

Just as they are starting she looks up at me, "Good-bye, Dick," she says simply, and holds up her mouth to mine.

"Good-bye, little one," I say, kissing her forehead. And yet—and yet—could one kiss from me harm those beautiful, innocent lips?

I must go back to town to-night—or, better still, this very hour, now that I have the strength. . . .

There are some days that hold a lifetime in them—that pass we know not how, in which the changes even of the day are not marked by us, when we measure time by a look, a word, a heartbeat—and this is one of them.

Subtly woven in with the simple story of home life without, is the darkness of the tragedy within me, and to my life's end the peace and beauty of a Sabbath-day in the country will bring back with the vividness of life every hour and incident of this one—the first of absolute guilt that I have known.

I told them all at dinner that I should be compelled to return to town to-night; and when they had all, save one, loudly wondered, I added, that certain matters connected with my profession would probably compel my departure for Paris the following Saturday to the Monday, instead of coming to Sieviking, as usual.

By that time the Ullathornes will be here, and then—and then—

A criminal should pray rather that he may be deprived of the power of looking forward, than of that of looking back.

Somehow we all keep together through the day. Green Sleeves avoids me no more than I do her. We can speak to each other almost naturally, and the rest seem to observe nothing amiss.

The evening meal is over, and they are wishing me God-speed on my lonely walk of five miles upon which I have refused to be accompanied, when all at once I miss my Lady Green Sleeves.

"Where has she gone?" says Pink May, looking round in wonder.

Where should she have gone, save where every mother goes when her heart is heavy, to ease it on the lips of her child, to hug him to her breast, and, by mere human contact, to persuade herself that she is not utterly alone?

It is thus that I find her when I enter the nursery, her boy's head against her bosom, and, in the attitude of both, something so forlorn and pathetic as might bring to my eyes such tears as that man is indeed accursed who has occasion to shed.

She looks up as I approach her. O! Heavens, that look of hers should have power to pierce me thus!

"I am going now, Green Sleeves. Good night, and God bless you."

They look up at me together, these two solemn, beautiful young faces . . . and my blessing seems to die on my lips as a curse. What am I that I should bless such as these? Then I stoop down, and kiss them both . . . purified of passion, made sacred by *their* purity, shall sin be found in such a kiss as this?

I turn at the threshold to look back. The child smiles, and waves his little hand to me in farewell; the mother has hidden her face upon his neck; the door closes; I have left her to bear her suffering alone.

CHAPTER V.

"Love is a familiar, love is a devil ; there is no evil angel but love. Yet Samson was so tempted, and he had an excellent strength ; yet was Solomon so seduced, and he had a very good wit."

"AND when are you coming back ?"

"The day after to-morrow."

"You're hiding something from me," says the woman, sullenly.

"Take care that I don't get to the bottom of it. I believe you've got some sweetheart shut up somewhere."

"No—no sweetheart."

"And when shall I see you again ?"

"At the usual time and place. Who was that went by ?"

"A man. Are you ashamed to be seen speaking to me ?"

"Good night. How cold the wind blows up from the river !"

"Kiss me—Richard !"

The voices cease ; footsteps recede in opposite directions ; the bridge is empty.

* * * * *

I came home this afternoon to find that the boys and Hetty had already arrived, but that Ullathorne was detained in town, and would come by a later train. I had a long search for Green Sleeves, but found her at last, and she welcomed me with as much coldness and sweetness as though I were a stranger and a bidden guest.

We talked laboriously on our way back to the house, and were so polite that even our misery scarcely prevented our laughing in each other's faces.

But I was able to note that a fortnight had changed her as years of ordinary life might not have been expected to do, and how she is but a shadow of the merry, happy creature who ran riot with the boys about the old home such a little while ago.

On the lawn we find Hetty under a tree, eating strawberries

and cream, with the Squiffer in attendance. She offers me some, and I sit down beside her, while the Squiffer, with all the ardour of a young lover, escorts his adored playmate back to the house.

"What is the matter with Charolais?" says Hetty, looking after the pair; "I should scarcely have known her. And this is a love match," she goes on, shaking her head, "and love matches are *mistakes*."

"And what of yours, Hetty?"

"O! love is all very well when you have something at the *back* of it, and Ullathorne and I are very happy. I have never had cause for a moment's jealousy," she goes on, fanning herself placidly; "he never looks at any one but me, and really does not know when I ask him, whether a woman is pretty or ugly—I have certainly been very fortunate in a husband."

The longer I live the more clearly I see that to be ignorant is the only sure recipe for happiness in this world, and that the cleverest person never discerns in the dullest a defect that the latter has not long ago discovered in him.

"Now, of course," she proceeds, "it is all very pretty and nice to marry your fancy, and buy back the old place; but, as a matter of taste, and for living in, I prefer Florizel's castle, and in my opinion, and judging by results, Florizel herself would have suited you a hundred times better than Charolais does."

"That is the sort of thing one must try beforehand to make sure of."

"And really, though to sit here and recollect everything by degrees is quite delightful, and gives one a novel sensation, it is rather a shock to see how it all seems to have *shrunk*. Could we ever have flattered ourself that Sieviking was anything but a modest country-house?"

"It has not altered to me."

"I told Ullathorne that it was quite an ancestral sort of dwelling—I'm not sure that I even did not promise him a moat

—he will think I have been romancing. Dear me,” she adds, in a tone of wonder, “what is that?”

An apologetic cough issues from a cluster of shrubs hard by, With many a bobbing and courtesy there sidles into view no less a personage than the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

“Which, begging of you to excuse the liberty,” she says, hugging her reticule, and smiling in her most agreeable manner, “but I’ve ventured to call this morning to pay my respects—if only for old acquaintance sake, Miss Hetty.”

“Mrs. Ullathorne, if you please,” says Hetty, with dignity.

“And which, indeed, Mrs. On-a-thorn,” says the Chancellor, greedily eyeing Hetty’s sumptuous length of train, “but I’m rejoiced to see how times has changed for you since the days when—”

“You can go,” says Hetty, magnificently. “Good-day.”

“And I can’t do anything for you this morning, ma’am?” says the Chancellor, lingering. “There must be a sight of things you throw on one side, and—”

“I give all my old dresses to my maid,” says Hetty, with dignity.

“And a pretty penny she must make out of them,” says the Chancellor, holding up her hands; “pr’aps, now, I might do a stroke of business with *her*, ma’am? I’ll go up to the house and see.”

“No, no,” cries Hetty, her airs utterly routed; for would it not be death to bring the Chancellor and that smartest of fine ladies, Rosalie, *en rapport*? “I—I left her in town.”

“I should have hardly thought you ekal to folding up that gown yourself,” says the Chancellor, suspiciously; “though to be sure, saving your presence, there was a time when you’d have been ’appy enough to get such a one to fold up.”

“You can go,” says Hetty, with great distinctness.

“Good-day to you, mem; good-day, sir. I’m sorry to see you looking so ill, for all the world as my brother did last year when he was took in a waste and died in three months. And

if you could persuade Mrs. Sieviking, sir, to buy a silk once in a way, instead of for everlasting wearing them white washing gowns, it would be better for trade, and more becoming to her position. Good-day."

"Do you think she is likely to run up against Rosalie?" says Hetty, quite pale with alarm, as the Chancellor disappears in the direction of the house. "Perhaps I'd better go and make sure." And off she goes at a quicker pace than she has probably used since she left Sieviking.

She has not been gone many minutes when I see Ullathorne approaching with Pink May from the house. Even at this distance there seems to be something unusual in his mien, and I go to meet him with a distinct presentiment of evil.

Less of friends than foemen is the look exchanged between us, and our hands, meeting, fall asunder almost before they have touched.

"We expected to find Hetty here," says Pink May, who is as fine as a finch in May.

"Where is your wife?" says Ullathorne to me abruptly. Our eyes meet.

"Here she is," says Pink May. Turning, we see Hetty and Green Sleeves crossing the lawn together.

For a moment Ullathorne shades his eyes with his hand, holding his breath; then he goes forward to meet them.

I see him stoop to kiss his wife, I see him look at Green Sleeves; then they all come back to the tree, and sit down.

"You may put your arm round my waist, if you like," says Hetty to her husband; "of course it does not do to make oneself remarkable in town, but there is no disgrace in doing such a thing in the country. Besides, it's comfortable. Upon my word, I think we are beginning to change places with you, Dick, and that you and Charolais are becoming the fashionable couple, while *we* are turning into a Darby and Joan!"

CHAPTER VI.

"If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart,
Absent thee from felicity awhile,
And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain,
To tell my story."

THE church bells have done ringing, and the house is hushed and silent as the grave. Service has begun, and at last I am alone, to draw breath, to look my position in the face, and to confront the new difficulty that Ullathorne's presence has brought with it.

Hark ! what was that ? Hasty footsteps crunch the gravel ; a man comes in sight—it is Ullathorne himself.

"I thought you had gone to church," I say, as he comes into the room.

"I turned back at the church door. Sieviking, I would rather say what I have to say anywhere but here, but speak I must, and the sooner the better."

"Say on."

"Two nights ago I had occasion to cross a bridge in an unfrequented portion of the park. The moon gave enough light to show me a man and woman in the centre of the bridge in such deep converse that they did not even observe me pass. You were that man—the woman, who was she ?"

"That is my affair."

"Yesterday, thinking you would come down by a late train, I went to your rooms to propose that we should travel together. I found a woman there—the same that I had seen with you the night before."

"What !" I cry, starting up, "she dared to go *there* ? She must have watched me home—she may follow me even here."

"Then it is true," cries Ullathorne. "Good God ! and I have been refusing, even in the teeth of facts, to believe it possible !"

"*What* is true ?" I say, turning and facing him.

"You can ask?" he says, with a fierce gesture of loathing. "*You*, who in the minds of all who know you best, are set so far above mere vulgar sin and its degradation?"

"Sin?" I repeat mechanically; "you call it sin? You talked to her, I suppose, and she told you all."

"She told me nothing in words," he says, with disgust. "Eyes, voice, manner spoke their own tale plainly enough; yet in the face of all I *would* not accept your guilt. I said to myself that accident might have brought you together at that late hour of night, that she might have forced her way unbidden into your rooms—though her air was entirely that of one in her right—but you deny nothing."

"I deny your right to challenge my actions," I say haughtily. "Neither to you nor any other man am I responsible for them."

"When you challenged mine," he says quietly, "when you branded me as dishonourable, and cried shame on the day when you and I had been as brothers, I bore your unjust taunts through a sense of honour to *her* who was as ignorant of my love as I was incapable of making her aware of it, and my self-contempt was so bitter that I could patiently endure yours. Now our positions are reversed, and as once you strove to save *me*, so now no false pride shall stand in the way of my saving *you*."

"You cannot save me, Ullathorne; it is too late."

"It is never too late, or too soon, to shake off the shackles of such a sin as this—the longer the stain continues the deeper it sinks. Wake, friend, *wake*, from the deadly stupor thrown over you, and be able to see once more your wife's sweet face, your boy's smile, your friend's heart—pick yourself up all bruised and muddled from the recent fall, but still *yourself*, and thank God that you have not been permitted to pass into that lethargy of the soul that ends in death."

"Death! He never knocks at the doors where he is welcome."

"I do not speak of the common lot—that is imposed on us

—but of that other which is vested in our own hands. Friend, do you ever think of what you hoped to be, and what you now *are* ? ”

“ Often.”

“ Dick, there are men who profess to love their wives and yet behave as you are doing, contemptible curs, who can combine vice with virtue so cleverly that neither the world nor the outraged woman ever suspects the truth—but you are not one of those men. For you the fall is sheer from virtue to vice, and that you are not able to find happiness abroad and at home simultaneously, is proved by the misery of your attitude towards your wife, and hers towards you.”

“ Leave us as we are ; do not meddle between us,” I cry fiercely.

“ There is that between you in which I have no hand,” he says sadly ; “ it would break my heart to see on the face of the woman I had married such as I see on that of your wife’s. Yours is not the nature to play out a common course of deceit to the end—your conscience does not permit you to rest happy in your infatuation. If you desire content you must give up one or the other—your present vacillating, contemptible policy only makes each one miserable, and must end in a catastrophe. Choose between them, man, the vile beautiful stranger or the pure lovely little creature, who by her wife and motherhood is bound to you by a thousand ties of suffering and of love—but never seek in the same hand to hold both.”

“ How dare you name them in the same breath ? ” I cry through my clenched teeth.

“ I dare to utter—what you dare to *live*. Man, you do not love her ; I see it in your eyes—can you not overcome this mad infatuation and *leave* her ? ”

“ I cannot.”

“ You will not even promise me to try ? ”

“ It would be no good.”

“ *What* is her attraction ? ” he bursts out in a voice of dis-

gust ; "is it her magnificent beauty that has made a fool of you ? Learn, then, that it is at every man's disposal—that she is no more faithful to you in heart than in eye and word—and it is for such a return as *this* that you are sacrificing such home happiness as never man knew !"

"A word with you," I say, gripping his shoulder, "what are these passages between you and—*her* ?"

"None," he says, shaking himself free, "I meddle not with another man's quarry. Others may not be so punctilious—therefore if you value her, have a care. Pah ! to give up all for a woman who has not even the merit to pretend to be faithful to you !"

"Have a care," I cry warningly. But his scorn is so much nobler than my anger that my eyes fall before him, and for the first time in my life I know the bitter degradation of being despised where hitherto I have been honoured.

"What do you propose to yourself ?" he goes on, pacing the room with rapid steps—"that when this mad infatuation shall have worn itself out you will return to Charolais, and repent conveniently in her innocent arms ? Let me tell you that she is not one of those easy wives—that when *you* are ready to proffer your languid affection, you will find you have irretrievably lost her love."

"No, no," I cry, the words wrung from me ; "not that—don't say that—"

"She loves you yet," says Ullathorne ; "I saw her to-day look towards you with eyes full of love, then clasp her little hands above her heart, and half move towards you, then draw back—and then sigh so pitifully . . . Sieviking, at that moment I *hated* you."

"And yet she did not come to my side. Ullathorne—she makes not one sign of love—"

"She is proud—no woman worthy of the name would proffer love where it is not welcome, and so make herself disgustful to him. Cleanse your heart and life of this foul sin, and she will

come to you quickly enough—instinct keeps her from you now.”

“She has the child,” I say curtly; “after a time she will grow to love him best, and be happy.”

“Yes, she loves him,” he says slowly. “I looked through the window this morning, and saw a picture. It was only a young mother who was holding out her arms to a little child, who, for the first time, stood alone. He feared to move a step forward, yet longed to reach the embrace just beyond its reach. Thus, she luring him on, love at length gave him courage, and he tottered a few hasty steps forward to be caught to the mother’s breast. . . . O! Dick, what a hug was there! It was as though she were devoured by hunger, and he the only thing at hand wherewith to stay it, and I thought those two pretty faces that kissed and clung to one another had something of sadness in them that the presence of one person would have removed.”

At this moment, from the garden without, we hear the child’s tender little voice, like a young bird dwelling upon the one note that it knows, calling “Papa! papa!”

I press my hands against my ears.

“Would to God,” I cry, “that he had never been born!”

“Rather thank God that two such guiltless creatures call you father and husband,” he cries warmly. “Oh! that the centre, the mainspring of such a home and hearts as these should place himself at the mercy of a wanton’s caprice! Man, man! you are throwing all away, *for what?* You find no sweetness in this miserable tie—your face tells that. You are like the children who fling away their toys to run after and seek to seize the jewels that they are told lie sparkling where the rainbow touched the earth, and when you awake from your madness what will remain to you?”

“Work.”

“If you can work with such a memory as yours will be, you are to be envied.”

"I will make her happy," I say doggedly. "She shall be amused, distracted. I will make it my business to pass the time quickly to her."

"You will give her a stone for bread," he says bitterly, "and she will—die. But before that she will discover the truth—she is on the high road to discovering it now—and leave you."

"Never!" I cry fiercely; "she remains—here. Through me she shall never know the truth. There is only one other who can tell it her—you."

"And what if I tell her?"

"I will kill you."

"Once I had not been ashamed to die by your hand; now to meet death by it would be dishonour."

A moment, and two men are locked together in desperate struggle; the next, a woman's voice on the threshold causes them to fall asunder, each wild passion dashed weak as water unto earth, as, with outstretched hands, there hurries forward my Lady Green Sleeves.

CHAPTER VII.

"Come, come, in wooing sorrow let's be brief,
Since, wedding it, there is such length in grief.
One kiss shall stop our mouths, and dumbly part,
Thus give I mine, and thus I take thy heart."

"WHAT!" she cries, "you would fight on my account? O!" she turns to Ullathorne, "do not seek to kill him because he cannot love me! If I can forgive him, cannot you?"

"Charolais," stammers Ullathorne, "we have been quarrelling over a foolish trifle; but what has that to do with you?"

She does not heed him; she comes groping as one blind until she has found me. As she lays her hand upon my arm the door closes upon Ullathorne; we are alone.

"Dick," she says, looking up in my face, "is it true?"

I cannot lie to her ; she reads the truth in my eyes, and without a word drops at my feet. Thank God I can take her in my arms, and she will not know it ; I can kiss her lips and call her by every foolish, desperate word of love that my heart suggests, and she will not hear me ; thank God that once more she is as much my own as in the days when no other woman had come between us and our great love for one another.

As she lies in my arms, I ask myself must not that man be a wretch upon whose heart this pale loveliness, sweet as the bruised, beaten-down petals of a white violet, would not take more hold than that of a certain magnificent beauty of which I wot ?

I kiss her hair, her little hands, her lips, I rock her in my arms as though she were a child. She is mine, *mine* for the last time maybe on earth, and with jealous eyes I watch against each sigh of returning consciousness, and could find it in my heart to wish that she might never waken to hatred of me, and the truth. As yet this pretty face has worn but love and smiles for me, from those dark eyes have looked but honour and such pride in me as should have created the world they seemed to behold. How shall I bear her contempt, or see myself shrivel in her regard to a pigmy, defaced by a despicable vulgar sin, that her woman's nature will not even permit her to comprehend ?

And yet, when at length she struggles back to consciousness instinct, not memory, guiding her, she clings to me like a frightened child ; her bewildered eyes seek safety in mine : then for a moment her head falls forward on my breast. She sighs.

"I had a dream," she says vaguely, "a bad dream, Dick. How came I to fall asleep in the daytime ?"

She draws one arm from my neck, sits up, and looks round bewildered, till her eyes fall on the prayer-book that she has all through held tightly clutched in her hand.

Memory grows in her dark eyes. "Not yet ! not yet !" I

cry, holding her to me, but she slips out of my arms, and stands alone.

"It was not a dream," she says, shuddering, and pointing to the red cross on the little book. "While I listened to you, *this* seemed to burn itself into my very heart. . . . I remember now."

There is a sound of voices without ; the rest have returned, but Ullathorne gets them all away, the boys loudly grumbling that they may not go in and see if Charolais has recovered from the faintness that made her come out of church.

"Poor fellows," she says mechanically ; "they will be sorry—they will miss me."

Her eyes leave the open window and return to me. I have been watching her, wondering if her pride be greater than her love—whether she will spurn me, in her keen sense of outraged womanhood, or, true to that womanliness so infinitely more potent to reach a man's heart, be conscious only of *her* loss and my fall . . . Not the wrong, but the pity of it, is surely the cry of every true woman who loves, and who finds herself betrayed.

"I cannot rail at you," she says dully ; "that would not give me back your heart. I said that we were too happy . . . Oh ! Dick, Dick, is it *you* ? The truest, best, noblest lover . . . Oh !" she cries, desperately, "*it cannot* be true—it must be all a mistake ! Say it is a mistake," she cries, coming to my side, her anguished eyes seeking mine piteously, with only love, pure love looking at me out of them. But I answer her not a word.

Before my silence she shrinks back as from a blow, and catches at the table for support.

"I have been proud," she says, below her breath. "Oh ! God forgive me for that. I felt that something had come between us, and I *could* not seek you ; but, perhaps, if I had been gentler, *kinder*, I might have won you back, or at least things would never have come to this."

She might have won me back! Oh! Green Sleeves . . .

"And so that is why you have avoided me these past weeks," she says slowly; "because another woman had taken my place. And you did well in that. My humiliation would be greater than I could bear if you could have come from her to me, and pretended to love me still."

The colour leaps into her cheek; as one stung by bitter shame, she covers up her face, and shivers.

I stretch out my arms towards her with a wild, desperate yearning, of which she knows nothing. When again she lifts her head I am standing apart by the window.

"It has been my own fault," she says, very low. "She who has not the power to keep a man's love has only herself to blame if another woman wins it from her. I was never beautiful, like this woman whom you love, or noble, like Florizel. I could only—*love* you."

A shadow crosses the sunlight; it is Suzel with the child in her arms. He catches sight of his mother in passing, holds out two eager hands, and calls upon her by name.

Her face changes, the slow terrible tears gather in her brown eyes. . . . I know how that little voice has knocked at her heart, how at once the pride, the misery of motherhood work within her, how as wife and mother equally, my desertion strikes her with a cruel sense of outrage. . . .

"You never loved him as I did," she says, with quivering lips; "or you could not—you could not have done it."

"I never loved anything or anybody on earth but you," I cry fiercely; "and you know it, Green Sleeves, you know it."

"You love me?" she says, trembling; "and how can that be? I heard you say that you could not, and would not give her up. If you loved me, would you desire to continue that which makes us both wretched?"

"Green Sleeves," I cry, snatching her two hands, "disbelieve in circumstances—my own words, my *acts* even—believe only in *me*, and that I love you to the very last beat of my heart,

as I never have loved, never could love, any other woman living."

She looks up; through our eyes, heart speaks to heart, and in a moment we are clinging to each other—our lips have rushed together, and time loses itself in a kiss that has no past, no future, only a present in which the hoarded sweetness and riches of a lifetime are gathered up.

"O! my little one—my little one," I cry, as, that supreme moment past, she *remembers* and seeks to escape, "stay with me—do not go away from me—believe nothing but that I *love* you."

"Dick," she says, almost in a whisper, "all my pride is dead . . . if I can forgive you, I will. . . . Tell me the whole story, husband . . . and give me a little time in which to get over it."

"I can tell you nothing," I say doggedly, "but that I love you."

"What!" she cries, pale as death; "you have no explanation to give me—you will not tell me that you are less guilty than Ullathorne . . . and I . . . supposed?"

"I can explain nothing."

She looks at me with wild, incredulous eyes, eyes in which love will surely never grow for me again. . . .

"Oh! you ask too much," she cries bitterly; "and your circumstances are too strong for me. I will go away, as I resolved to do when I overheard you . . . I and my little baby, and leave you free to be happy with *her*."

"No," I say; "you shall not go away; you and the child remain—here."

"Never!" she cries with spirit, "if you had told me the whole truth, and had sworn to me never to speak to that woman again—could you have done that?" she adds abruptly.

"No."

"And yet you would keep me here!" she cries. "O! what degradation . . . I will go this very day, and I will tear this love for you from my heart, or *die* . . ."

She starts up, her spirit fairly roused at last, passionate shame in every line of her face ; for the moment her love trampled down, and set at nought by her pride.

"Wherever you go I will follow you," I say doggedly, "and bring you back ; so do not think to escape me, Green Sleeves !"

"You would become my jailer?" she cries, with contempt. "You would make me sicken at the sight of you, till my hatred for you was greater than my love had ever been !"

"I would rather have your hatred than another woman's love. I would rather that you died in my arms than were happy out of them—and that is my love for you, Green Sleeves."

"Love !" she says below her breath ; "O ! no, you never *loved* me ! What is she ? *who* is she ?—this woman that has changed your very nature, and in a day is able to overthrow the traditions, the influences, of years ? You have never been one to love lightly, or let go easily. If already she is stronger than I, then I will not stoop to contest you with her—only let me and my child go away together . . ."

I turn aside to think hard and deep.

She is right ; there is no chance of happiness, or, on her side, of anything but disgust, if we continue to live together.

Some one would ever shoulder her away from my embrace—'twixt her and me would pass, hateful as the clay-cold corpse laid between the bridegroom and his bride, a woman's shape, and every innocent joy would be poisoned by that guilty consciousness of which I had not power to free myself.

"Charolais," I say abruptly, "it shall be as you desire. I will not inflict my presence on you, but I exact one condition—that you still continue to live here with the child."

"I cannot keep you out of your home," she says, in the dull, effortful voice of one in whom hope is utterly dead, "and it would be torture to me to be here, to be reminded at every turn of what my life once was—of what you once were . . .

O ! it is a heavy price that you pay for your new love—wife, child, Sieviking !”

Ay, the price is heavy, but it is one that will be exacted to the uttermost farthing, and I know it, as I stand looking out at the lands so long coveted, so lately mine, that after to-day my eyes may never behold again.

“Green Sleeves,” I say, turning, “though we talked for ever we could not alter things—only death can do that, or restore us to one another. Do not let us quarrel over so slight a thing as whether you shall live here, or elsewhere. Choose whether you will remain unmolested by me—for I swear never to set foot in Sieviking again unless summoned by you—or to be followed by me wherever you go ; and remember (I drew a hard breath before inflicting on her the cruellest stab of all) I have full power to take the child from you if you refuse to yield to my authority.”

“You would take him from me?” she cries, her dark eyes wild with fear. “O ! God forgive you for that speech !”

At this moment we hear his voice without. Instinctively, and as one who in her anguish knows relief to be at hand, she stretches out her arms, and turns towards the door.

“O ! my baby—my little baby,” she moans as she goes, in a voice that it might break any man’s heart to hear.

I put her back, I go out, and, taking the child from the nurse’s arms, send her away, and bring him to his mother.

And then I say to myself that there is no hurt to a woman’s heart that her child’s kiss cannot heal . . . and I go away, leaving them there together, knowing that I have prevailed, and that at least she will be safely sheltered among those who love her well.

CHAPTER VIII.

"It's I will kiss your bonny cheek,
And I will kiss your chin;
And I will kiss your clay-cauld lip,
But I'll ne'er kiss woman again."

IN the hall I meet Hetty.

"Can you tell me whether we are to have any luncheon to-day?" she says resignedly; "also, whether every person in the house but myself has temporarily gone out of his senses?"

"Come with me," I say, taking her hand; and, wondering much, she accompanies me to the school-room, and sits down opposite me.

"Hetty, Charolais and I are going to part."

She stares at me for a moment in utter amazement, then slowly shakes her head.

"I'm not surprised—much," she says, "for of course I couldn't help seeing how wretched you were together. But why more wretched to-day than any other? I shouldn't have thought you ever got near enough to one another—to *quarrel*."

"We have not quarrelled . . . but for the future I shall live entirely in town, and she will remain here."

"H'm! A case of Edmonton and Ware, and the staring will follow as a matter of course. What a million pities that you did not marry Florizel!"

"Hetty, you will be kind to her: you will try and make her life a little happier, if you can?"

She looks at me, then puts an arm around my neck, and kisses me.

"Poor boy," she says; "somehow, things never seem to go straight for you. I declare you are beginning to look quite old and grey. But you and Charolais will make it up again, never fear."

"No; it is nothing that can ever be made up."

"Ah! so people always say at the time. I met Ullathorne looking as though he were going to be hanged—does *he* know?"

"Yes."

"Well, take my advice; tell nobody else. Sit down to luncheon as though nothing had happened, and afterwards go to Charolais. Now that you two *are* married, why not make the best of a bad job? Besides, your means will never permit of your keeping up two establishments, and a scandal in the family would be extremely disagreeable; so do be reasonable, Dick!"

"Did you ever know me take up or relinquish a thing lightly?" I say sternly. "Charolais and I to-day part *for ever*. Try for a moment to put yourself in her place, and feel for her."

"No," says Hetty, "I cannot. I should never quarrel with my husband. In society no one does such a thing."

"But the fault is mine," I cry; "*she* has done nothing."

"I should never have married a person who was likely to treat me badly," says Hetty calmly, "and I don't believe it's your fault. But of course, I will be kind to Charolais, poor girl! It is lucky she is so wrapped up in the child, but I think she was really fond of you *once*."

I turn away with a groan—O! poor, ignorant Hetty.

"And now," I say, "I want you to go to lunch with Pink May, and the boys, and Ullathorne, and will you ask him to come to me here afterwards?"

"You come, too," she says coaxingly, "and I will go afterwards and talk to Charolais and see what I can do."

"No, no," I say, shuddering, as I think of that young figure sitting in its terrible despair with the child pressed against her bosom; "I forbid your going near her, Hetty, and no one is to disturb her."

"O! very well," she says, departing with a displeased air; and then I am left alone in the old familiar room with my thoughts.

There is not a nook or corner in it that is not endeared to me by memory, or by those later and sweeter joys that I shall never taste again. Here I have sat with Green Sleeves—yonder she and I have worked together, with many a pause between for play—by the old spinet stands our little boy's high chair with a broken toy on its seat—on every side is some token of the happy home life that was mine.

Will my darling venture into this beloved haunt in which the very walls will speak to her of me and cry aloud my name? If she comes it will be trembling, and with many a pause and halt between, and then, please God, she will weep if her heart be not broken beyond the power of tears. On the ground I spy a ribbon—*hers*. As I press it to my lips Ullathorne comes in, and before I can thrust it out of sight, has seen gesture and ribbon, both.

"Dick," he says, "we were angry—we acted like madmen; for God's sake let us see if we can do anything to put this miserable business straight instead of quarrelling. There is something in all this that I *can't* understand, and I'm convinced you *could* explain the whole thing if you chose."

"Where *she* could not succeed," I say; "judge if you are likely to do so? No, Ullathorne, she and I part for ever; I have no more explanation to give her than you."

"But you love her still," he cries. "I saw it in your eyes when she came in—your face now tells the mortal agony it is to you to lose her."

"Can anything you can ever say to me equal the power of one of her pleading words?" I cry fiercely. "There is not another syllable to be said on the subject. We have parted for ever."

"O! it is monstrous!" he cries. "I give you warning, Sieviking, that I will not rest till I have got to the bottom of this secret—that I will spare no pains to break you of your mad infatuation; you shall have proof and to spare of the worthlessness of the creature for whom you are sacrificing your wife."

"Dare to meddle in my affairs," I say, through my set teeth, "and you shall bitterly rue the day in which you refused to accept my warning. If you have any affection for *her*, leave well alone, and do not seek to know a fraction more than you know already."

"Am I to see her die without making the slightest effort to save her?"

"Ay," I say hoarsely, "even that rather than the other. Now to business. Will you accept the charge of her in so far as your power lies? Will you tell me from time to time how she fares? Above all, will you guard against any knowledge reaching her that is calculated to make her more miserable than she is already?"

"You set me a strange task," he says bitterly. "Such things as these you might have asked a friend to do—and we are not friends after to-day. The man that I have loved and honoured is dead. Before Heaven I would not change places with you as you stand to-day."

"Yes, yes, I say," his words holding no meaning for me, for overhead I think I hear *her* footstep, and my mind is possessed by the question of how I can contrive to get another sight of her before I go.

"You have promised," I say, as I rise, and mechanically look round the room, with a vague unreal feeling that I am only dreaming over again the farewell I said to it so many years ago. "I will write to you about money arrangements, and for God's sake keep my sisters from tormenting her, if you can! I shall tell them nothing—whether they are to know the truth must rest with Charolais herself."

"*What* is the truth?"

I go out, not answering him, and upstairs, and so to my darling's room; but she is not there—to the nursery, which is empty of any but the child, the nurse being in the room beyond.

He comes tottering towards me on his little unsteady feet, and as I take him in my arms, and he lifts his tender little

mouth to kiss me, the iron band about my heart gives way, and the first tears that have left my eyes since childhood fall on his wondering, beautiful face.

The nurse approaches—I put him down and leave the nursery—he may be a grown man before ever my eyes light on him again.

Ten minutes later I enter the dining-room, and each voice is hushed as I go up to Pink May, and lay my hand on her arm.

“Aunt,” I say quietly; “I am going away from Sieviking to-day for a long while—perhaps for ever. I leave Charolais and the child in your hands, and pray of you to guard them as jealously as I myself could have done.”

Before she has recovered her breath sufficiently to speak I turn to the others.

“Boys—you will make your home here so far as you are able; and if you should ever wish to see me, you know where I am to be found in town. Take care of your little Charolais, . . . your playmate.” My speech chokes me; I struggle out the one word “Good-bye,” and leave them.

Then they all start up; even Hetty, with sobs, caresses, and would follow me, but I put them all back. I have one more farewell to make, and that must be alone.

Where I found her first with the green sleeves on her arms (those sleeves that with a certain pair of tiny shoes are hoarded away as my greatest treasure), there I find her now, a woman, not a child, with a woman’s breaking heart looking out of her dark eyes.

Short and bitter must be this farewell, with never a pause for thought, or I shall be betrayed into some madness of dishonour worse than any that has gone before; I shall take between my lips some promise that I am powerless to keep, and retain her love at the fearful cost of her degradation as well as my own.

She sees me approach, but only looks up in a dull fashion,

as one who has no longer aught to hope or to fear from me, and when I kneel by her side, she neither moves nor speaks.

"Green Sleeves," I say, and my voice is as dull and passionless as her white face, "I have come to wish you good-bye."

Her lips shape themselves to the word "Good-bye," but utter no sound.

"And you will kiss me once, Green Sleeves, for the last time."

Is it better for me that I asked this last boon—that the memory of that clinging kiss in which our souls were merged in one another, should be shouldered aside by one so cold and apathetic that it falls away from my lips almost before it has reached them?

Better a passionate refusal than this cold, cold acquiescence—I lift her hand; that, too, is chill as ice. As I linger she speaks, and her voice is coldest of all.

"Good-bye."

And then I go my way, not looking back, for I know that beneath the supreme test of a woman's love, the knowledge that another woman is preferred to herself, Green Sleeves' love for me waxes faint, and is like to die.

Book V.

CHAPTER I.

“Tis not the frost that freezes fell,
 Nor blawing snaws inclemencie;
 ’Tis nae sic cauld as makes me cry,
 But my love’s heart grown cauld to me.”

It is Christmas Eve, and I am alone—alone with the ghosts that come thronging about my knees, or look at me with sad, estranged eyes out of the heart of the fire before which I sit.

Sweetheart, friends, brothers, sisters, chill with contempt or hot with condemnation, their faces one by one rise before me, and only when they have all faded, comes that of a child whose blue eyes sinile up at me with the only welcome worn for me now by any human creature on earth, whose lips alone, scarce knowing what they utter, call upon my name in tenderness and love.

A year ago, and he was less to me than the least of the curls on my Lady Green Sleeves’ head; now I seem to see my error most clearly, not in the evil consequences that have fallen upon her, but in those terrible ones in the future that must befall *him*. I have lost her love for ever, but I would win and keep his, and as I sit in my lonely room of evenings I recall the many times when I put his caresses by, and long passionately for one touch of those tender, trustful lips. The boys talk laboriously to me of him when they come once in a way to see me, good, honest fellows whose contempt for me is

so hearty as to awaken their protective instinct and make them careful to avoid hurting my feelings.

"The youngster grows your very image," they say, "and he has not forgotten you a bit."

Now surely this is odd, for a child of two has little memory. Some one must speak of me to him, and who but his mother, for all that she is never heard to speak my name? Cold and silent as one about which a shroud is woven, her face looks at me out of the coals, and I ask myself if indeed she could once have fretted sorely for me, and loved me well, and even for one brief moment have put pride away for my sake?

Her face fades, and Florizel's takes it place, eloquent with love, sublime in its noble faith, as with passionate words she pleads, as Ullathorne could not do, Green Sleeves' cause against the stranger woman; then hers, too, changes, and I see the love and belief swept away in a burning torrent of scorn, and in her eyes a great blaze of contempt that should scorch to ashes the sin that disfigures my soul. And my friend—my ain friend—what of him? I cover my face with my hands. All these I have lost, and I have gained—what?

I lift my eyes to see the answer before me. A tall figure, cloaked and hooded, has entered the room. With a sudden movement the wrappings are flung back, and a woman is kneeling by my side.

"Do not send me away!" she cries, clinging to me. "Richard, Richard! you are lonely here to-night, and I am lonely too, and I *could* not stay away from you!"

I unclasp her arms without a word, but as I rise she snatches at my hands and hides her face upon them. I have no power to free myself from her as she half kneels, half crouches at my feet.

"Strike me!" she cries, "spurn me from you with your foot—treat me as you would treat your dog, only let me breathe the air you breathe! Let me see your face sometimes,

touch your hand, and hear your voice ! Deprive me of light, air, food, but do not expect me to *live* without ever a sight of you ! ”

“ Hagar,” I say wearily, “ what new madness is this ? Did you not promise me that you would not come here again, especially after what happened last time ? You have your own home—a very different one to this.”

“ Yes,” she says bitterly, “ in which you never set foot. I only went there on conditions that you have broken, and so I throw my promise also to the winds, and am here to-night.”

“ I have been busy.”

“ Busy ! ” She throws her arms above her head with a magnificent gesture of disdain. “ Would every combined obstacle on earth keep me from *you* did I know myself welcome ? ”

To what shall I compare her as she stands before me ?—Flame ? Night ? A whirlwind ? There was a time when I counted Green Sleeves dark—now, in my memory, she shines white as a sea-mew beside the dark splendour of a loveliness that seems to fill my miserable room with warmth and colour. I turn aside with a shudder.

“ If you look at me like that,” she cries swiftly, “ I will kill you. Hatred I can bear, neglect has become to me as bitter, as natural as life, but your contempt I cannot, and will not endure. And to think—O ! my God—to think that once you loved me !—loved me as no man before or since ever did.”

“ *Since ?* ” I cry, turning on her.

“ Why not ? ” she says, a sudden flame lighting up her black eyes. “ You leave me alone—you show by every word, look, and action that the tie between us is a hateful one—and if I turned to other men for the love you deny me, could you wonder—could you blame me ? ”

“ Do what you will. Your actions can neither honour nor dishonour me now.”

“ You *loved* me once ! ” she cries fiercely ; “ O ! those days

—that was love, that was idolatry, if you will ! I tasted life then—I drank it to the very dregs. . . . Any love that I had known before, waxed cold as death, feeble as an infant's wail beside that one superb torrent that swept me before it as a leaf—and left me to wither as one ! ”

“ That was not love,” I say, with a gesture of loathing. “ I never loved you—never. But had you behaved decently I would have done my duty by you to the end.”

“ I did not love you then,” she says sullenly. “ I am not one to love lightly. Until the past few weeks I never dreamed what you had become to me, or I would have escaped before it became too late. And, however you may scorn me, I tell you this : that when a woman, no matter how bad she is, really loves, she is as good as the best woman, or better, for the latter has never been tempted, and much that shines as pure gold would quickly melt if passed through the furnace of temptation.”

“ That may be ; but such love I do not covet.”

“ I have not forced it on you ; I do not ask you to love *me*. I ask only the right to love *you*, to be with you sometimes, to serve you—not to be thrust away from your side like any stranger.”

“ It is impossible,” I say sternly. “ You know the terms of our agreement, and I will not depart from them. You can either leave me altogether, or let things go on as they have hitherto done.”

“ And what if I stand on my rights ? ” she says, facing me defiantly.

“ You have none ; your own conduct destroyed them long ago.”

“ I have enough to separate you from the woman you love,” she cries, “ and that such a woman exists I am convinced. It is nothing to me that since the night we met you have never been out of town above half-a-dozen days in all ; that you write no letters, receive none, and bury yourself night and day

in your books. I know that she exists, and that the love you once gave to me has now become hers."

"No," I cry unguardedly, "it is a very different love. And what would you do if you discovered her?"

"Tell her the truth."

"And what if she knew it already?"

"There *is* such a woman," she cries suddenly, "and I will find her."

"How?"

"By will and patience. Already I have learned something—that you are not of the class to which you have represented yourself as belonging."

"I told you I was of the middle class—as I am."

"That you worked for your bread."

"As I do."

"I have made inquiries," she goes on, "and once I thought I had traced you to be one of an old county family who lived at a place called Sieviking Court, but the head of that family is a surgeon—so I knew I was mistaken."

"Let well alone," I say curtly; "you are better off as you are."

"There is one man who could find out the truth about you," she says slowly; "but he is abroad now. When he returns I will—"

She pauses abruptly, as a loud knocking is heard below.

"Hide yourself, quick! You will be found here," I cry, snatching up her cloak and hood as I hear footsteps ascending and a man's voice calling my name. But to my surprise she stands perfectly still, pale as a corpse, her eyes opened wide in a kind of stupor, and fixed upon the door.

"Who is that?" she says, lifting her finger and pointing towards it.

"Gilfillian," I answer, forgetting in my excitement that I never tell her the names of my friends, and hurrying her towards a second door leading to an inner room. "There,

quick, you can reach the stairs through this"—but she has scarcely passed through it when Gilly bursts in, half mad with drink, yet with eyes keen enough to see the skirts disappearing through the opposite door.

CHAPTER II.

Bassanio. Do all men kill the things they do not love?

Shylock. Hates any man the thing he would not kill?

"HA! ha!" says Gilly, as he reels towards me; "a petticoat, Dick? O! fie! What would—"

I dash my hand over his mouth before he can complete his speech, and he falls back as though beneath a blow.

Throwing open the door through which Hagar passed, I fling the light of the lamp around, but she is not there. I lock the outer one communicating with the stairs, and return to the sitting-room.

"Why, man alive," he says, as I sit down opposite him, "have you taken leave of your senses? And—no offence, Dick—but I'm sorry."

"What about?"

He nods towards the door through which Hagar passed.

"I saw your wife once, and she seemed to be a woman who might keep any man straight. I looked at her, and remembered I once had a mother and a sister. . . . Women nowadays are apt to make a man forgetful of that fact."

He has been drinking deeply, but as yet has lost control over neither brain nor voice. As his eyes meet mine I see that he has reached the drunkard's last excess—opium.

"Where have you been hiding yourself, lad," he says, "all these months? They couldn't tell me at St. Saviour's. The house-surgeon thought you'd cut the profession, and gone to live in the country, and at your lodgings they could only tell me that you'd left, leaving no address."

His wild eyes wander round the room with a puzzled expression.

"Yesterday I met one of your young brothers, and asked him for your address—and here I am. But I thought you'd come into some money, Dick, and bought some old place with it? John James told me something of the sort—or I dreamed it."

"I live here always," I say, stirring the fire, "and I am as poor as you, Gilly—and poorer."

"Ah!" he says, with a gleam of light on his face, "then that was your wife I saw just now. I'm glad of that, Dick—very. But I wish I could see you in a better place. You ought to begin to make a little money, now."

"It is a very little, truly."

"You've not gone in for a hospital appointment?"

"No."

"You are right. Hospital appointments, without private means to back them, usually land their owners in the work-house. Every soul connected with the hospital gets paid except the medical men, without whom the whole thing must collapse. THEY are expected to give the best years of their lives, the fruits of a costly and arduous education—for nothing. But this they are told leads to practice; so they go patiently on for ten, fifteen, twenty years, living meanwhile entirely at their own expense, and if they can hold out so long, perhaps begin to succeed when they should be about retiring on the fortunes they would have amassed in almost any other walk of life (the professions excepted). Or the man dies, just as he has turned the corner, leaving no provision for wife or children; or health and purse fail him before the tide of fortune has turned, and then there is another of those sad events that are a result of the radically-wrong system upon which hospitals are managed."

The fire of an honest indignation for a moment pierces the dull glare of his eyes; then he stretches out his hand as

though to reach something—the most significant of all traits of the habitual drunkard.

“No ; I did not mean to go in for that, Gilly. I was not ambitious then, and a little country practice, with ample time in which to read, think, and possibly invent, would have satisfied me. But that is over now—for the present I have dropped the profession, and whether I ever resume it again is uncertain.

“Why, man, what do you do?”

“A friend’s influence procured me a berth in the city. I am thus able to earn bread and cheese for such as are dependent on me.”

“And what does John James say?”

“He does not know. He had an accident five months ago, from which he has not recovered yet. I went to see him last week.”

“He is a good fellow, Dick—he had a blow once, as I did ; but my blow was different, and I took it differently.”

“You lost some one you were fond of, Gilly?” I say, some thing in his face moving me with a sudden compassion for the poor wretch.

“No,” he says, his dull eyes looking away over my head, “I never lost her—she went willingly. Fifteen years ago this very night my wife kissed, and bade me good night, for I had been ill, Dick, ill unto death, and when I awoke on Christmas morning with her name on my lips, I called for her in vain ; she had fled in the night with the man who had been her lover before I married her.”

I listen to him intently—this story, to which John James has alluded more than once, comes home to me.

“She did not love him, but intrigue was natural to her as the air she breathed, and she disliked him one degree less than me, had already repented of her marriage with me, and, as lightly as a butterfly breaks a spider’s gossamer thread, snapped the chain that bound us, and was free.”

“How long had she been your wife?”

"Three months. I was twenty years older than she. I married her on her sixteenth birthday in Paris. I had gone over there to make certain researches connected with a work on which I was engaged, and one day, in the *Place de la Concorde*, I saw a young lady grossly insulted by a fellow in a blouse. I came to her rescue, escorted her home to a poor but decent quarter of the town, saw her mother—a careworn, jaded likeness of her beautiful child—called next day, and in three weeks was married.

"No words could do justice to her beauty; but the moral sense, as I speedily found out, was wholly wanting. Intellect was a sealed book to her—a man was noble, clever, and adorable to her only in so far as he was able to gratify every caprice and desire of her passionate, pleasure-loving nature; she was as a piece of wax to receive every exquisite impression, and anything beautiful either in man or woman, nature or art, would rouse her to enthusiasm.

"Fair of face, light of foot, proud of glance—masterful with the strength of the finely-tempered Damascus blade, not the clumsy, brutal strength of the heavy battle-axe; often and often I have heard her thus describe her ideal man, and many and many a time as I have looked at you, Dick, I have thought how exactly you fulfilled this woman's idea of perfection, and how, if she had ever met you—bah! where is she now? I am talking of fifteen years ago, lad, fifteen years ago. And that is all the story—but at every Christmas-tide it all comes back to me as fresh to-day as if it were yesterday, and I seem to see her as she came to me where I lay, worn and weak, with scarcely the strength to utter her name, her beauty as fresh, as glorious as a newly-blown crimson rose to which the dew still clung, and kissed me good-night. I fell asleep with words of blessing for her on my lips, with tears of yearning love for her in my eyes, for I had grown to love her, Dick. She was so young, I so old, it was like loving a child who might vex you, but with whom you could not be long angry,

since it was so utterly dependent on your protection. I loved her with the one true, pure affection of my life; up to that time I had not been a bad man, as men go, but she might have made me a good one."

His head falls forward on his breast; for a moment his wild eyes soften.

"Well, it's a poor creature that will throw his soul away after a wanton, but there are men like that, and I'm one of them. I did not follow them; I was too ill, and if I had come across them then I should have killed them both. Even now I get the feeling in my fingers sometimes"—his hands slowly open and shut as if they closed on something, and into his eyes comes a look of murder that is as a brief glimpse of hell—"and if I come across her then, with the drink on me, I should *kill* her, lad, throttle the breath out of her body as she has throttled the life out of my soul."

What was that? A stifled cry seems to sound at my very side; I start up, but on the point of searching for its cause, Gilly's face and attitude arrest my attention.

He is leaning forward, his arms stretched out before him on the table, the fingers spasmodically contracted, his eyes wide open and glaring over my head at something he surely *sees*.

I turn, expecting I know not what, but there is nothing save the wall behind me.

"To throttle," he says, in an excited hiss, "that is what the word *Sin* signifies in the Sanscrit, for the hold that sin takes upon a man is as the grasp of the murderer on the throat of the victim—*Sin—Drink—Satan*, they are all one . . . To slay her body were a less sin than she committed when she slew my soul."

"No," I say sternly; "you slew it yourself. No woman, however bad, has power to do that for a man—she can only make him suffer; his life is still in his own hands."

But he does not hear me; as his clenched hands relax, I seem to see the wandering fires of madness in his eyes; he rises, snatches at his hat, reaches the door, then turns back and wrings my hand hard.

"If ever you wish anything for me," he says, "wish me dead. For if ever that woman crosses my path—" he ceases abruptly, and gazes mistrustfully around. "Somehow her influence is upon me to-night—I seem to feel her near me; think you, Dick, the devil will send her in my way to-night?"

"If he did," I say, as I button up my coat, "you should not harm her."

We go out together, and it is daylight when I return to the dwelling that I now call home.

CHAPTER III.

"And all great fears which now import their dangers,
Would then be nothing; truth would be but tales,
Where now half tales be truths."

To my surprise a fire is burning in the grate—a man rises to meet me, Ullathorne.

"I came here just after you had gone out last night," he says, "and thinking you would soon be back, waited till now."

His voice is colder than usual, his eyes do not meet mine—I know what he is thinking, and let him think it.

"Hetty had set her heart on my taking you back for Christmas," he says; "I came to town late last night on purpose to ask you."

"Thanks," I say curtly, "but it is impossible, and you know it."

"Yes. But I wanted to speak to you about Charolais. You once bade me guard against any knowledge reaching her that could add to her misery; from information that has reached me, I fancy she runs a chance of being made more wretched than she has ever been yet."

"What threatens her?" I cry, starting up.

"This. Hitherto it has simply been known at Sieviking and

the neighbourhood that you and Charolais do not live together, no blame being attached to either, many people believing that it is entirely on account of your profession that you are always in town."

"And what has happened to disturb this belief?" I say calmly, but with a thrill of fear running through me.

"You once made an enemy—unfortunately, of a man who had injured you. Such a man never forgives, neither does Mr. Titmarsh."

"What! *He* has come back again?"

"Yes, and with some information either guessed or acquired about you that at present he withholds, but at any moment he may proclaim."

I turn aside, and about my heart there creeps some such curious cold as old wives say a man feels when a stranger treads over his grave.

Has all my care after all been in vain? Shall the blow that I have so desperately striven to avert from my Lady Green Sleeves' head fall on it with crushing effect from the hand of my lifelong enemy?

"We can only suppose that he knows about this—woman," says Ullathorne after a pause; "that he has watched your house, and seen her comings and goings, or that he has heard of it in some other way—possibly from herself."

"No, no," I cry wildly, "it is impossible; she would have told me had such been the case. I will go to her at once, I will warn her against him," and I snatch up my hat in a fever of excitement.

"Stay," cries Ullathorne, "you jump too violently to conclusions. Remember that we have nothing positive to go upon but Mr. Titmarsh's intense curiosity about you, your doings, and certain hints that he has let drop in his conversation with Charolais."

"What! he has seen, he has talked with her?"

"Assuredly. He arrived at Sieviking the day before yester-

day, was admitted by some blunder of the servants, and had made a favourable impression on Charolais before she knew who he was. He asked her how long she had been married, and she told him nearly two years and a half. It was an odd thing, but he took out his note-book then, referred to an entry in it—and smiled."

It flashes across me how only last night Hagar said she could find out all about me from some one now abroad, though I had then taken her to mean a very different man to Mr. Titmarsh. Now I recall many circumstances that point to him as the originator of the whole hideous deception so cunningly planned, so skilfully carried out, and my blood boils within me as I think how for the second time this accursed, smooth-tongued villain has blighted my life, and not mine only, but the two other lives so infinitely dearer to me than my own.

"It struck me," goes on Ullathorne, "that in some way he might have heard of your first marriage abroad, especially as for the last four years he has resided almost entirely in Paris, and that was why he asked Charolais when she was married."

"Confound him!" I say, through my teeth; "he would never have dared to set foot in the place if he had not known there was no chance of seeing me there. Where are the boys?"

"In town—he would not have obtained entrance to the house if they had been at home."

"He has my address," I say grimly; "but I hardly think he will avail himself of it—it will be now my business to obtain *his*. But first, I will go to this woman."

"Not until you have tasted food. Dick, when did you eat last?"

The familiar name spoken by him brings the blood to my cheek—for a moment I do not reply.

"I forget. Yesterday at noon, perhaps."

"Heavens! Dick, you are a bad host. I have not breakfasted either."

I throw down my hat. "Pardon me, Ullathorne, you shall have some at once," and I ring the bell.

"Not unless you will eat with me."

"Are you not afraid that bread broken in such company will choke you?" I say bitterly.

"No."

And when half an hour later we sit face to face with each other at the simple meal, for a moment I could almost persuade myself that the old halcyon days of friendship have returned.

CHAPTER IV.

"Dangerous conceits are in their natures poisons,
Which at the first are scarce found to distaste;
But with a little act upon the blood,
Burn like the mines of sulphur."

I PART from Ullathorne with the understanding that we are to meet again at one o'clock. Eleven is striking as I take a latch-key from my pocket, and open the door of a small house that looks out on a corner of the Regent's Park.

It is a pretty, fantastic little cage—its owner could scarcely have counted the cost when she offered to exchange it for my miserable rooms.

As I lay down my hat, the sound of a familiar voice proceeding from a room close by brings the blood leaping to my forehead. It is ten years since I heard those languid, refined tones, but time has touched neither their music, nor my hatred of the speaker. Before me are two doors, separate entrances to rooms that communicate with each other, I turn the handle of the one nearest to me, and enter.

But Mr. Titmarsh and Hagar are in the room beyond: myself invisible, I stand still for a moment to hear the completion of his speech.

"—here at once. And indeed, my dear Hagar, I think I deserve some thanks for interesting myself thus on your behalf—to rise at so early an hour, and in such an inclement season, too; I have not done such a thing these twenty years."

"Why did you come?" she cries fiercely. "What new plot is in your head now, I wonder? You can find some other instrument, for I'll lend myself to no more."

"Plots!" he says, in a tone of well-bred surprise. "I never plot, it is too much trouble. I have come to you to-day in the interest of morality—and your own; I assure you that in this instance the two are identical—"

"How dare you!" she cries, her voice like nothing so much as the track of a firefly on the air. "One more such speech and I will turn you out of this house with my own hands."

"I wish you would look at me again like that, Hagar," he says plaintively, "that last flash of your eyes positively warmed me. And a lovely woman never looks so lovely as when she is in a rage. We shall have some pictures worth looking at when painters have really grasped that fact; and then your complexion, with all the glow coming from inside, instead of being deftly applied *out*, it is a real pleasure to look at you—but this by the way. To return—in the interests of morality it is desirable that your relations with Richard Sieviking should be placed on a different footing, and that is why I came here to see you this morning."

"Leave us to manage our own affairs," she says sullenly. "We want no help, he nor I, from you."

"I confess I was *surprised*," he says gently, "on passing his rooms late last night, to see you issuing from them. I felt that I could not be mistaken in that commanding figure, and took the liberty of following you home; hence my appearance here this morning. Yes, I must confess I did not expect to find you on such friendly terms with the man who—"

"Silence!" she cries vehemently; "do not dare to say one word against him—you, who stand to me for everything

he is not, while everything that he is you could never, never be!"

"So!" he exclaims, "you love him?"

There is a ring of hatred in his voice that startles me. Our own hatred for others always seems natural, while any sign of theirs for us usually takes us by surprise. She does not answer—I think she has turned impetuously away from him.

"I made the acquaintance of such a pretty creature three days ago," he says, with apparent irrelevance; "it was at an old fashioned country-house, over which she presided. I never saw anything more bewitching—and *young*, and after all youth and freshness please some men more than the beauty, however magnificent, of maturer years."

"You are driving at something," she says scornfully. "Speak out. Who was this girl?"

"Richard Sieviking's wife."

For a moment I hold my breath, expecting I know not what. Amazement fills me as she says jealously, but with a voice that has no surprise in it,—

"And she is very pretty, you say?"

"Exquisitely so. And you knew this all the time?"

"Yes," she says, in a dull, hard tone, "I knew it."

"Of course it can be nothing to you," he goes on smoothly, though I can detect a profound disappointment and even discomfiture in his tone, "for you are dead, you know. Let me see, my dear Hagar; you died—and were buried—the 30th August, 187—, and Dick Sieviking was married the 15th of the following October. Quick work, but then he was in love."

"Bah!" she cries jealously; "he never loved her as he loved me—never."

"Now do you know, Hagar, that I should be inclined to doubt very much if he ever really loved you. He was violently attracted by you at first sight, no doubt, but he cooled so very quickly—"

"That was because I did not love him," she says doggedly, "or care to keep him *then*. Now, now—"

"Now he adores his wife," says Mr. Titmarsh, with a sneer ; "and upon my word I don't wonder."

"He never sees her," she cries swiftly. "Since he met me by chance, six months ago, he has never left town but twice, and then only for a night. He has behaved all through like the man of honour that he is."

"Scarcely, I think. Really it went quite against my conscience to call her Mrs. Sieviking."

"Your conscience !" she cries, turning upon him like a tigress; "whose doing is the whole miserable business? If this poor fellow had been your enemy, if you had wished to wreck his life, I could understand it; but he was *nothing* to you. And as for me, cunning as you thought yourself, you could scarcely imagine that, my freedom regained, I should turn to *you*—you when I had wilfully cut myself free of such a man as Richard Sieviking."

"Indeed, Hagar," he says languidly, "of whatever service I may have been to you at a trying and difficult period of your life, I assure you I never had the remotest intention of transferring your charms to myself. I always admired you very much, but whirlwinds are not comfortable to live with, and I prefer you—at a distance."

"You lie," she cries fiercely. "When you followed me home, and used a hundred artifices to get speech with me, you were no valetudinarian, but a—"

"Spare me," he says plaintively. "Really, Hagar, there is a nervous strength about your diction that reminds me of some savages with whom I had to deal many years ago. It is quite true that I followed you home; I was interested in you, and when I became better acquainted with you and your amiable mother—by the way, I hope she is well?"

"She is better than she ever was before—she is dead."

"Ah! To continue ; it was not long before I was in possession of your story. You were discontented, unhappy, sighing

for luxuries and enjoyments placed entirely beyond your reach by a certain—circumstance. In the course of conversation one day I happened to mention a woman who, precisely in your position, delivered herself from it, reprehensibly no doubt, by her mother-wit. She was injured in a railway accident, the woman sitting beside her was killed—she caused the latter to be buried in her name, and the mistake, for the dead woman was a poor friendless creature was never discovered. You seized upon the idea with avidity and—carried it out.”

“By your help,” she says sullenly; “without it I could have done nothing.”

“I admit,” he says calmly, “that after your—ah—demise, there were some trifling details to which I in a mere friendly spirit attended, but I did not approve, even though I acted the part of father when, *en secondes nocces*, you wedded the Russian count who was to provide you with everything that you desired—position—wealth—admiration; by the way, where is he now?”

“I left him,” she says calmly; “I wearied of the St. Petersburg life after a time; the splendid respectability of my life suffocated me—I came to England.”

“And the fortunate man who accompanied you?”

“I came alone—believe that or not, as you please.”

“I will try to do the former,” he says resignedly. “So that accounts for my receiving no reply to my letters to you for the last eight months. But somehow, when I heard that Richard Sieviking and his wife had parted, I instantly connected their separation with *you*. Curious that the first time I passed his door I should see issuing from it the Countess Petrywalski.”

“Say that you were spying on him,” she cries passionately; “and yet *what* is it to you whether he sees me or not? What are our affairs to you in any way that you should meddle in them?”

“In the interests of morality, my dear Hagar,” he says, and by his voice I know that he is speaking with half-shut eyes,

"it is desirable that *Mrs. Sieviking* should be awakened to a sense of her position. I may tell you in confidence that I am thinking of marrying and settling down in that neighbourhood myself, so that it would be *disagreeable* to have to keep up the farce any longer ; and dangerous if it came out that a man of my well-known character connived at such doings. Therefore I am going to tell her ; and I think such conduct very courageous on my part."

"Spare yourself the trouble," she says indifferently ; "no doubt, she knows it already."

"I think not," he says quietly.

"I hate her," says Hagar, so low that I can scarcely hear her ; "if killing her would give me his love I would crush her life out as one does the life from a fly." She pauses as one across whose mind has flashed a sudden memory. "Tell me," she cries vehemently, "could a man maddened with drink and hatred, strangle a woman in the streets of London, before any one had time to save her ?"

"He might. Do you apprehend violence from some of your lovers ? Pardon me that truth compels me to use the plural."

She draws her breath with a kind of shiver.

"Perhaps," she says. "Well !" (with a bitter laugh), "as you reminded me just now, I grow old ; I am nearly thirty-two years old—as well die that way as any other !"

"No," says Mr. Titmarsh, pleasantly, "you are too handsome to be disfigured by such a death. Well, I am going to Sieviking this afternoon, what do you say to accompanying me ? I shall probably call on Mrs.—ah—Sieviking to-night, and she is really very pretty. I think you would feel it a positive pleasure to look at her. I am very honest to propose it, for, candidly, I don't think your opinion of me will be raised, though perhaps after to-night you will understand better the interest I take in the family of—Sieviking."

"Why should I go ?" she says bitterly. "If you had followed me in here last night you might have persuaded me to

anything—I would have gone anywhere to be revenged on her, but now—now I have lost heart, and more, I will not a second time make of myself a tool in your hands. I will see her—never fear but I will see her, but not with you.”

“Love has tamed you,” he says coldly, and by his voice I think he is rising, “nevertheless, I believe you will accompany me to-night.” I do not wait to hear another syllable; noiselessly as I have entered, I leave the house, send a telegraphic message to Ullathorne, and in less than an hour am on my way to Sieviking.

CHAPTER V.

“Now I have tasted her sweet soul to the core,
All other depths are shallow; essences
Once spiritual, are like muddy lees.”

THROUGH the schoolroom window the ruddy light of fire and candle shine, a beacon to my eyes as I cross the lawn.

Drawing near, I look in and see that the interior is gaily decorated with holly and evergreens, while in the centre of the room a *tableau* in process of being enacted rivets my attention.

Some one has made a wreath of mistletoe and set it on the head of a little fellow who is strutting up and down, uttering certain incomprehensible sounds that are received with hearty laughter by two young women who kneel on opposite sides of the hearth-rug—My Lady Green Sleeves and Florizel.

I say to myself, jealously, that the former has not altered in any one particular, that her face is as happy, her laughter as joyful, as when my place was by her side; but even as the thought comes to me, she catches the little toddler, as he passes, to her heart, and her eyes, looking straight over his head, seem to meet mine, and tell the world of misery that lies behind her momentary forgetfulness. When she lets him go,

he crosses quite naturally to Florizel, who also gathers him up as though he were the only precious thing the world contained and as he struggles out of her arms, having, like all brave boys, a hearty contempt for kissing, I am able to note the changes that six months have made in *her*.

She has put off her robes of mourning since I saw her last ; perhaps it is the change of dress that makes her appear younger ; anyway, with this tender look on her face, she is sweeter, more attractive far in my eyes than she ever was before.

"Time for Dick to go to bed," I hear her say, as he escapes. "Let me take him up to-night, Charolais, and you rest quietly here."

She has risen, and crossing over to my darling, lays her hand upon the brown head with a gesture of love, for which I bless her in my heart.

Green Sleeves looks up, and I know now that no jealousy breaks the perfect confidence that exists between them.

Meanwhile the child has approached the window, and now, with his golden head pressed against the pane, seems to be looking into my face. Does he see me ? At any rate he lifts a small forefinger, and, pointing it at me, calls out, "Papa, papa !"

I tremble beneath the actual sound of the little voice that night by night I have so vainly imagined, but as Florizel advances I draw back.

"No, no," she says gently, "not papa, little one," and takes him up in her arms and carries him away.

A minute, and the room is empty, but while I am still hesitating as to whether I shall go round to the other side of the house and enter openly, Green Sleeves returns, and sits down in her usual place.

She looks around as though to make sure that there is no one by to observe her, then draws from her bosom a locket, holds it for a moment unopened in her hand, then touches the

spring, and I know that if I could see her downcast eyes, I should find nothing but love, pure love, for the pictured face within.

So for once she can forget her boy to think of the father . . . O ! Green Sleeves, poor little heart, you little know with what a message of evil that father is now making his way towards you.

The door is ajar, I push it open and enter. Have her ears grown dull that she does not hear me coming, that I have actually reached her side before she looks up and sees me ?

Some such look as might grow in a woman's eyes if her passionately regretted dead were suddenly restored to her, I see in those of my darling as I kneel beside her, and not daring to touch her hand on her robe, struggle with dry lips to utter her name.

"Green Sleeves," I say, and my voice is harsh from the intense effort to speak ; "I have brought you bad news—that is why I have broken my promise to you and am here to night."

"Bad news ?" she says, and I seem to have forgotten how sweet her voice is as I now hear her ; "there can never be any more bad news for me, however long I live."

"Can you think of nothing worse, Green Sleeves, than losing my love ?"

"Nothing."

"There has been no disgrace to you in our changed circumstances. The dishonour has all been mine. Could you bear to have the finger of scorn pointed at you by the world, and our child—O ! heavens, our child branded with a life-long stain ?"

"He has done nothing," she says, trembling. "No one would be so cruel as to punish him for your sin. . . . O ! what fresh misery have you brought down upon him and on me ?"

"It is nothing new," I say wearily ; "it is only the accursed fruit of a mad folly committed years ago, and that until six months ago I had thought dead and buried. . . . Green Sleeves, can't you guess, can't you think at all what it is that I am going to tell you ?"

"No," she says, almost in a whisper, "I can't. . . ."

"Then," I say desperately, "I must say it out without help, and if it kills you, Green Sleeves, if it kills you. . . . Child, you are not my wife, and our boy . . . O ! God ! our boy, he has no legal right to the name he bears."

My head falls forward on her lap ; I cannot, I dare not look at her.

"So it was your wife, only your wife, who separated us six months ago ?"

"Only my wife ? O ! Green Sleeves ! Yes, it was no one else. She pretended to be dead for her own ends, but one night I met her."

"You used not to love her," she says, turning her head away, but I see the colour creeping over her neck. "Do you love her now ?"

"You know better than that," I say sternly. "But is your heart broken, Green Sleeves, and can you ever forgive me the wrong I have unconsciously done you and the child ?"

"Dick, did you ever kiss her since you thought you married me ?"

"My lips have never touched hers, or any woman's, since I parted from you six months ago."

"And is that all your bad news, Dick ?" she says, still with her face turned away.

"All ! O ! Green Sleeves, is it not enough ?"

But as she does not move or speak, I say to myself that it is because she cannot, . . . that as she realizes the whole force of the truth, she is stunned by it beyond the power of expression.

"I have never brought you anything but pain and misery,"

I say slowly; "now I bring you shame, . . . and all my love is powerless to shield you, Green Sleeves."

"Your love?" she says, in a very low voice, "and do you love me still, Dick? After all these months in which I sent you no word, no sign, any more than if you had been *dead*?"

I do not answer her, for she has turned; we are face to face, and then—what is this that nestles and clings about my neck as though it had found its rightful home at last, and would never let go of it again unless Death himself should come to tear her away?

"O! Green Sleeves," I say desperately, as we cling together, "you must not kiss me—you must not; we are not husband and wife now, we are only sweethearts."

"I don't care! I don't care!" she cries, her lovely flushed face pressed against mine; "you love me, and that is enough. . . . You are *my* Dick—my very own, not that other woman's. . . . O! Dick, Dick!" . . . and then she has no more words ready, only her heart, as it leaps against mine, tells all, and more than all, of her content.

There let her nestle, let her cling; Fate may surely spare us these few moments together out of the lifetime we are doomed to live apart.

This is our last feast of love, and in it there shall be no stint—lip to lip, eye to eye, we will pour out our whole hearts like water, seeking only to outvie one another in the riches brought by each. . . . We will set free the prisoned love-words that have turned back frozen on our lips during the past weary months, till we grow dumb from excess of language, and of each other's faces we will take so long, so deep a fill as shall last us through that long to-morrow in which we shall thirst and be an hungered for a sight of them.

I tear my eyes from my darling to look at the clock, and see that in less than twenty minutes Hagar and Mr. Titmarsh will be here.

"Love," I say, "you do not know the worst yet. I should

not come here to tell you this to-night, but that *she* is on the way to do so herself, or rather Mr. Titmarsh brings her—Mr. Titmarsh, who originated and enabled her to carry out the whole deception."

Our half-hour of happiness, snatched from Time, is over, my arms relax their hold, hate seizes and knits up each nerve and muscle, but a moment ago unstrung in strengthless relaxation of love. Through my veins leaps like fire the longing for revenge upon this wretch who has ruined my life both in youth and manhood; he is old and I am young, but before God I doubt my own strength to keep my hands off him when we come face to face to-night.

"You shall not see them, little one," I say, recalled to myself by her startled face; "leave me to deal with that scoundrel—he will be here very soon now, or I'm much mistaken,"

A light step behind me; I turn to see—Florizel.

"Dick!" she cries, the word forced from her by the surprise of the moment; then a great light of hope and joy spreads over her face, she hurries forward and looks from me to Green Sleeves, and from Green Sleeves back again to me.

"You are . . . *happy?*" she cries.

"Oh! yes, we are happy," says Green Sleeves, leaving me to throw her arm around Florizel; "it was all a mistake, dear, he never loved any one but me—never, never! . . . that woman was only his wife."

"His wife!" repeats Florizel, looking bewildered; "but she is dead—she was buried."

"She was buried," says Green Sleeves, lucidly; "but she was not dead, you know—she is alive now, and then she came back, and what could Dick do, poor fellow, but give me up?"

"O! Dick," says Florizel, taking my hand in both hers, while tears and laughter shine together in her eyes; "why did you not tell us this in the first place, and why if your wife is alive are you here to-day, sir?"

Green Sleeves has got hold of my other hand, and is kissing

and mumbling it with all her might ; surely no man ever had such utter love from two such faithful women as stand one on either side of me at this moment.

"My dear ones," I say, "I was a coward ; I lacked moral courage, and it seemed to me so much worse a thing that my boy and his mother should be turned out of their home with no legal right to the name they bore, than that certain loving women should think me a guilty, contemptible wretch, especially as I was never at any time worthy of their good opinion."

"I never could understand it," says Florizel ; "and O ! poor Dick, how you must have suffered, and what names I called you—but though I tried my very hardest to despise you, somehow there was something in your face that *would* not let me."

"I think you succeeded pretty well, Florizel," I say sadly ; "hark ! what was that ? Can they have arrived *already* ?"

A confused noise is audible in the distance, hurried steps traverse the passage, the door is thrown violently back, and Ullathorne enters hastily.

"They will be here in five minutes, if not sooner," he says, advancing ; "I managed to borrow a man's horse at the station and rode ahead of them. Charolais," he turns to her, "forgive my discourtesy," and he takes her hand, with an earnest look at her face that grows brighter as it rests there, "and Florizel, too—"

Their eyes meet in warm friendliness. "But Dick," he draws me aside, "what does it all mean ? You telegraphed that Mr. Titmarsh would probably go to Sieviking by next train, which, if possible, I must catch, but strange to say he has brought *her*."

"Ullathorne, that is my wife."

"What !"

"It was all a hoax ; she was not dead. I could not tell the truth because of Charolais and the child. And though you have seen her at my rooms she has been no more to me than the utterest stranger."

For a moment he stands incapable of speech, then the mists of wonder clear from his eyes, and in their place shines out the love, tried and faithful, of years.

"Dick!"

Our hands meet. . . . O! friend, friend, shall I say that my friendship for you is less than my love for my darling yonder, or that hers is greater for me than is that of the noblest woman-friend a man ever had?

"Charolais must not see them," he says a moment later, "and you are not to be trusted. Your hatred of the man may betray you into some act of violence. By anticipating his news, you have broken his weapon in his hand—he can only slink away like the cur that he is."

"Dick," says my darling, approaching me, "I want you to grant me a request, dear—the last, perhaps, I shall ever ask you. Will you let me see Mr. Titmarsh, and—*her*,—when they come?"

"No, no," I cry vehemently; "it is impossible. He would only insult you, and perhaps she, too, might—"

"They are coming here to triumph over me," she says, with a flash of the old spirit in her voice, "and if I could show him that I knew it already, and that I feared neither of them, it would discomfit him so, and I should like to see—*her*."

Her head droops, the colour comes into her face. . . . I cannot bear the idea of my darling meeting Hagar, but it would be sweet to dash the cup of triumph from Mr. Titmarsh's lips untasted, and I should be close at hand to defend her. . . .

"Let Charolais receive the villain," exclaims Ullathorne. "Is there no room with an inner one where you could hear all that passes?"

"There is the one that Mr. Titmarsh used to occupy, with the conservatory beyond. I saw the firelight in the window as I passed."

"The boys have been decorating it," says Green Sleeves, with such a flush on her cheek, and light in her eye, as bodes ill to Mr. Titmarsh, or I am much mistaken.

"Quick, then," cries Ullathorne, "I hear wheels; there is not a moment to lose."

A minute later and I am in the dark conservatory alone, where not only can I hear but see all that passes, while in the room beyond my Lady Green Sleeves, standing on the hearth-rug, with beating pulses awaits the arrival of her visitors.

CHAPTER VI.

"How doth the married woman?"

"Ah! madam," says Mr. Titmarsh, entering lightly, "I deeply regret that I should have occasion to come to you on so sad an errand as the present, but this injured lady"—he leads forward a figure cloaked from head to foot, and closely veiled—"has entreated my help; and thinking it better that the truth should be broken to you by a member of the family than a stranger, I have put self on one side, and am here."

My Lady Green Sleeves bows—she was always full of grace—but whence comes this proud and gentle dignity that might make you forget how ruffled is the silk of her hair, how simple the gown that clings to her young and slender shape?

"It is my unhappy lot, madam," he says, in tones of the deepest feeling, "to name this lady to you in a manner that will sound an insult to yourself, but I have no choice. This is—"

"Richard Sieviking's wife," says my Lady Green Sleeves, quietly.

"What!" cries Mr. Titmarsh, starting back, a glare of baffled rage overspreading the face that the past years have left untouched save for an increased yellowness of hue, "you have known it all the time, madam, and yet have been able to reconcile it with your conscience to take this lady's place, to bear her very name, appropriating to yourself the rights and privileges that were hers?"

But Green Sleeves turns from him with a gesture as though some creeping thing were nigh her, towards the tall figure that stands a little apart, as though disdaining the help she was said to have demanded.

"Oh ! madam," she says gently, "how came you to be made the tool of this bad man ? For I cannot think that you know who and what he is. He formerly lived in this house as the step-father of Richard Sieviking, whom he robbed of his inheritance, casting him and his brothers and sisters penniless on the world, and from the place to which he now insolently returns, secure in the absence of its master, he was ten years ago thrust out with scorn and contumely that befitted the exodus of the embezzler and the thief. Alas ! that he should find ready to his hand the only instrument that the whole world could have furnished with which to do the man he hated such an injury !"

With a sudden movement Hagar frees herself from the cloak and hood in which she is shrouded, and her beauty seems to flame out like a jewel from a background of darkness as she turns upon Mr. Titmarsh with a gesture imperial in its superb scorn.

"And so you have been using me all this while for the purpose of *revenge* !" she says, her voice intense as the sob of the wind that sweeps up before the storm ; "it was because you hated him—him whose name you professed not even to know ; that you originated and carried out the false story of my death ! Oh ! heavens, to be made the dupe of such as you—coward, liar ! *thief* !"

She hisses the last word in his ear with such violence that he seems literally to stagger under it for a moment, then he smiles.

"Still the same redundancy of language, my dear Hagar," he says pleasantly ; "but I believe we did not come here to bandy compliments, though if you and—ah—I am ignorant of this young lady's name—are going to make common cause over my fancied delinquencies, I will retire."

"No!" I say, entering from the conservatory, "you will remain precisely so long as it suits my pleasure."

The sneer dies on his lips; for a moment he stands the image of detected guilt and discomfiture, the next he has recovered himself, and advances in good order, the mask re-adjusted on his face, and smiling.

"Ah! you here?" he says, in a tone of affected surprise; "really a most fortunate coincidence; matters can be settled between the—ah—wives so much better now that the mutual husband is present."

"One more insult of that sort," I say, striding towards him, "and your years shall not protect you from the soundest thrashing a scoundrel ever had. What! are you not satisfied with being kicked out of Sieviking *once*?"

He retreats before me, but covers this retrograde movement admirably by seating himself in an easy chair hard by, whence he makes us an exquisite bow.

"You will excuse me," he says plaintively, "but I am not so young as I was, and these family rows are apt to be lengthened affairs, and we are all in the family here; pray make yourself quite at home, Hagar—Mrs. Sieviking, I mean. You must try and get used to the place of which you will in future be mistress."

Hitherto I have not looked at Hagar; now I turn to her, but she cowers away from me with such shame in her whole shrinking figure, as surely it is strange so guilty a woman should know.

"Poor wretch!" I say, looking at her with a disgust so profound as almost to touch pity, "from your first pursuit of me for greed, to this last cowardly assumption of rights that you know you do not possess, what a contemptible, downward course your so-called love for me has run!"

I go up to my Lady Green Sleeves, and as I put my arm round her, she nestles to my side, looking up in my face with as pure a glance of love and pride as any she ever gave me in the honoured days of her wifehood.

"Yes, this is love," I say, looking down on her; "pure and strong, faithful and tender, a crown of glory to the man upon whom it is bestowed; he could surely make her no other return than perfect constancy, or fail to love her as I love thee, my little one, my heart!"

With a terrible cry of "I am your wife!" Hagar throws herself between us, and thrusting Green Sleeves from my side, with savage strength grips my hands to her breast as she falls at my feet and crouches there, her magnificent head flung back, her eyes seeking mine with a desperate hunger and despair such as one may see in those of a trapped and starving animal.

"Say that you loved me once," she cries, "that the love now hers was once mine, and I can bear it; but do not deny that I was once dear enough to you to be made your wife!"

"I never loved but one woman in my life," I say sternly, "and she is yonder. What your past was before I married you, God knows; something of what it has been since you set yourself free of me by a criminal deception I have learnt to-day, and of that knowledge I shall avail myself to obtain a separation from you by the laws of France."

Her head falls forward on her hands, her hair sweeps my feet as it sinks lower and lower.

"Had we been married in England I could divorce you easily; as it is, I can prevent your sullyng any longer the name my real wife has served but to honour."

"I am your real wife," she says, lifting her head; "and by the laws of France you can never marry another woman as long as I live."

"You cannot hinder our loving each other," I say, looking across at my darling, who stands apart—and is it pity for this poor wretch that I see in her dark eyes?

"She will not leave you now," cries Hagar; "I would not for fifty wives if you loved me . . . honour . . . it is a cold love than which honour is stronger, and so you will be happy together, while I . . ."

She falls forward and lies face downwards along the ground, writhing as one put to intolerable pain; and what is this slight figure that kneels beside her, with a pitying hand laid on the darkness of this woman's head?

She looks up for a moment: I tremble, believing she is about to strike my darling, then she shrinks away, a kind of wonder growing in her splendid eyes.

"Do you know what I am?" she says harshly; "that I am bad—bad . . . not like you! but he loved me once . . . do not believe him if he says he did not."

She sits up, her eyes clinging jealously to Green Sleeves' face, who still kneels beside her.

"You are very pretty," she says slowly, "and your hair," she puts out her hand and touches one of those soft brown rings, "is like silk, but you are not beautiful. Until last night I did not know that such a woman existed as you, and if I could have got at you then . . ."

She looks away from Green Sleeves to me, and a sudden jealousy grows in her eyes as she turns them back again to my darling.

"It is because you are so sure of his love that you can be kind to me," she says dully; "I might like you if it were not for that—as it is, each kind word you say to me makes me hate you more."

"These private theatricals are very entertaining," says Mr. Titmarsh, looking at his watch, "and my artistic sense is too fine to wish to bring them to an abrupt termination; but time passes, and unless Mrs. Sieviking proposes to remain here to-night, we have only ten minutes left before starting to catch the train back to town."

"*We!*" cries Hagar, rising to her feet, and turning on him a look of the fiercest loathing. "I would walk barefoot every step of the way rather than endure one mile of it in your company. Go, and leave me to return as I best may—devil!"

"Perhaps you and your husband will arrange your little

differences of opinion, and you will—remain,” he says pleasantly, as he rises and buttons his overcoat across his chest. “If so, I shall consider myself fortunate in having been instrumental in so suitable an arrangement of the present—ah!—somewhat awkward circumstances.”

And with a bow of the deepest irony, he turns towards the door.

“One moment,” I say. “You will probably hear more of this business shortly. Unless I am much mistaken, your performances in Paris have placed you within reach of the law.”

“I think not,” he says, smiling. “Indeed, I may say I am certain you can prove nothing against me, and the statements of a woman of Mrs. Sieviking’s antecedents would scarcely be believed against a person of *mine*, for the public does not share your extremely violent views with regard to the Sieviking property. But of course you will do no harm in trying, . . . though I should advise you not, for hitherto, Dick, in any little contest that has arisen between us, I have invariably—*won*.”

He is standing on the very spot where, ten years ago, he swore to be even with me, and I laughed aloud for scorn to think that so poor a thing as he could work me any further harm.

For a moment he glances from one to another with a mocking smile, then the door closes; he is gone.

Hagar’s whole frame seems to shrink as he disappears, an expression of the bitterest hatred flits across her face.

“That I should have been made the tool of such as he, and against *you*,” she says between her clenched teeth, then stoops for her cloak, and swiftly wraps it around her.

“I can do you no more harm,” she says, looking with a certain hard indifference at us as we stand together, “and now you will be happy, I suppose. . . .”

“No, madam,” says Green Sleeves sorrowfully, “we shall never be *happy* again, . . . he and I part for ever to-night.”

"You *part!*" she cries incredulously. "What! loving each other as you do, you will part?"

But my darling, as she clings to my hand, looking up in my face, answers her never a word.

O! that in this terrible farewell so near at hand she and I might die together, and so the long struggle, and the sin, and the suffering, be over!

For a moment Hagar's eyes soften. Then, as I put my arm round Green Sleeves with a gesture of passionate love, her face darkens with a sullen jealousy; she draws her hood forward, and turns to the door.

On the threshold she pauses, looks back at us with an intent gaze, then wrapping her cloak more closely about her, shivers and turns away.

Book VI.

CHAPTER I.

“Nae living man I’ll love again,
 Since that my lovely knight is slain;
 Wi’ ae lock o’ his yellow hair
 I’ll chain my heart for evermair.”

SPRING—not in the haunts where she shows a different mood a hundred times a day, but in the Park, where she has but one smile, one robe, in which, like many another young beauty, she is admired precisely so long only as her freshness lasts.

Beneath the mingled sunlight and the shadow of the stripling leaves comes the Jersey Lily, the prettiest creature, methinks, I ever saw, save my Charolais.

And here, too, comes Hetty, with Siva at her side, and when she spies me with Ullathorne she reins up, and as I live puts her arm round my neck, and kisses me in the face of all the world.

“I don’t care,” she says, as Ullathorne suggests that people may suppose me to be an admirer; “any one can see he is my brother; and O! Dick,” she drops her voice, “why did you not tell me the truth last summer at Sieviking, and not make us all so utterly wretched about you?”

She only arrived in town last night, and this is our first meeting

“We had no idea how fond we all were of you,” she says, shaking her head; “it nearly broke Jill’s heart when she could go to see you no longer, because she ran up against that—*person* at your rooms.”

"And I had no idea I was fond of a certain fine lady," I say, laughing; "really, it's very pleasant to be received into the bosom of the family again."

"If only you could get a divorce," says Hetty in a whisper, as she stoops to pat her Arab's satin neck; "and, O! Dick, don't you think I've grown considerably *thinner*?" she adds, in her usual tone, as she sits erect and straightens out her pretty, plump form.

"You are almost transparent, Hetty," I say gravely; "soon we shall be able to see through you," and then she goes off laughing, and Ullathorne and I proceed on our way.

"Siva does not love you," he says presently; "the stupid fellow has got it into his head that the whole business is your fault; and, don't be in a rage, Dick, but I do believe he means to try and persuade Charolais to—marry him."

"What!"

If a bullet had crashed through my brain I could not for the moment be more completely stunned than I am by Ullathorne's words. The next, I realize that which has never so much as occurred to me before, how that Green Sleeves is free as any unwed maiden to marry whom she pleases, and how only by a tie that may grow weak with time, her *love*, is she in any sense bound to me.

Think of it—another man speaking to her of marriage, my wife . . . the mother of my boy; the thought is madness—

"Dick," cries Ullathorne overtaking me, for in my excitement I have devoured the ground with my strides; "surely you are not so foolish as to be jealous of *him*? Why, Charolais would not hear a syllable, I doubt if she would even give him an interview, for she is very sensitive about seeing strangers now."

"But it might happen some day that some one else should love her, and she might listen," I say, still striding on. "O! Ullathorne, you have opened out to me such a hell as will never permit me to know peace again."

"I was an idiot to tell you," says Ullathorne, vexedly; "I thought it a piece of very bad taste on Siva's part to be so keen about seeing her—and though some people admire that sort of faithful love, I, for one, *don't*; but as to attaching the slightest importance to his intentions, who would think of such a thing?"

"Ullathorne, where is she now?"

"Dick—don't ask me that."

"When did you see her last?"

"Yesterday."

"Then she must be in town, for I saw you in the morning. Did she send me a message?"

"Yes—it was in rhyme. She bade me say—

' She sends you the ring frae her finger,
The garland frae her hair;
She sends you the heart within her breast,
And what would you have mair? '

I was going to give you that message to-morrow."

"God bless her. She is well?"

"Yes—and happy. So different a creature to what she was at Sieviking after you left, that each time I see her I deplore that long, miserable misunderstanding—it seems as though she could bear anything now that she knows herself secure of her love."

"Thank God for that," I say; but in my heart I am thinking how differently women feel things to men.

Through all the time that I believed her love for me dead, I never suffered so intensely, longed for her so passionately, as I do now that I know every beat of her heart is for me, that I am in her thoughts morning, noon, and night, while my name is ever uttered in tones of love by her lips.

True, she has our boy, while I have nothing; but were he with me always, he could never satisfy the restless fever of a love that is eating my very life and strength away.

"Ullathorne," I say abruptly, as we leave the Park, "what

harm could there be in my seeing her now and then—before people?"

"Don't think of it," he cries vehemently; "surely that fearful scene at Sieviking, when you bade each other farewell, sufficiently showed you your own weakness, Dick? If it did not, it should have done."

When I laid my darling in Florizel's arms, and kissed her there, and she clung to me, and I tore myself away, to come back, and come back again, till at length by sheer force Ullathorne seized and dragged me out of the house—surely I learned then the danger of seeing again one who, my wife yesterday, is set further from me than the merest stranger to-day.

"Tell her that I got her message . . ." I say, as Ullathorne leaves me at my own door, "and that my answer to it is the first verse of her own ballad. I feel pretty sure that she is staying with you and Hetty; but do not be afraid, I shall not go to your house until you ask me."

CHAPTER II.

"I canna choose, but ever will
Be loving to thy father still;
Whaur-e'er he gae, whaur-e'er he ride,
My love with him doth still abide;
In weal or woe, whaur-e'er he gae,
Mine heart can ne'er depart him frae."

TWILIGHT is closing in—I shut the book that I have been making a pretence of studying, and my thoughts fly to her upon whom not an hour ago my eyes rested—My Lady Green Sleeves.

As I passed the Ullathornes' house in Piccadilly, from the other side of the way I looked up at it, and lo! at that moment she came to an upper window with her boy in her arms, and for a minute those two pretty heads leaned against the pane, looking out at the young green of the Park beyond;

then they went away, and I said to myself, trembling, that surely instinct might have told her I was near at hand—love have had power to draw her eyes to mine as I stood below. What is she doing to-night? Will they leave her at home, fearful of her meeting me abroad, or take her with them, doubting my strength to keep away from the house that contains her?

Ullathorne was right, there could be no safety in our meeting; friendship alone is a mockery betwixt her and me; the mere momentary sight of her face to-night has roused me almost to madness. Only half-a-dozen streets away, and we are as utterly separated as though she were above ground, I beneath it . . . but soon this torture of knowing her so near to me will be removed, for did not Ullathorne say, "I was going to give you her message to-morrow"? which means that she is only in town for to-night, and that by to-morrow she will be far beyond my reach again.

Is she thinking of me now as I am of her? Does my near presence press on her as heavily as does hers on me? If by strong longing two people could make themselves present to each other, then I should be at her side, or she would be at mine at this moment.

The door opens gently. Have I indeed gone mad, or does my excited brain conjure up the vision of my Lady Green Sleeves with some heavy burden clasped in her arms, standing on the threshold?

I have not power to stir; but as she comes forward I know that this is no spirit, but my darling, and that the burden in her arms is our child. . . . O! Green Sleeves, as well had you entered a lion's den as come here to me to-night!

"Dick," she says, with a kind of fear in her voice, as I do not move, only look up at her, "do not be angry with me for coming . . . but I have been so insulted . . . I felt as if I *must* come straight away to you . . . and I will get back again before Hetty and Ullathorne come in. . . ."

I have risen now, and set her in my chair, she is in her dinner dress of white silk, with a cloak thrown over that hides it almost entirely.

"See," she says, drawing the dark folds aside to show me the beautiful rosy child sound asleep on her breast, "when . . . when ~~he~~ had gone I took my little one out of his cot, wrapping him in my cloak, and stole downstairs, meeting no one by the way, and came to you, dear. . . . O! any one may behave to me as he pleases now, for I have no one to protect me!"

I see that she is trembling violently, that her cheeks are crimson with shame, while in her eyes is a look of outrage that turns my blood to fire.

"Who has dared to insult you?" I cry. "What! is there any man of Ullathorne's acquaintance so base as to take advantage thus of your defenceless position? Before heaven, I will read him such a lesson as shall make any other man chary of molesting you."

"If you look like that," she says, trembling still more, "I can never tell you, and I see now that I was wrong, very wrong, to come off to you . . . but O! Dick, Dick! just *think* of it, a person going down on his knees and asking me to *marry* him!"

"And was that all, Green Sleeves?"

"All?" she says, with a face of such horror as brings the ghost of a smile to my lips, "that some one should ask your wife . . . but no, I am not that . . . O! I thought I should have *died* of shame!"

"Perhaps he meant no insult, Green Sleeves. Remember that you are free to marry him, or any other man, if you please."

She looks up at me, for a moment, then her dark eyes fill with tears.

"I will go away again," she says, with a sob in her voice; "for O! I think your insult to me is even greater than was Lord Siva's."

"It was Siva?" I exclaim.

"Yes," she says, her pride keeping back her tears; "since he did no harm in asking me, why should you not know his name?"

As she seeks to rise, the child stirs and half opens his eyes.

"Give him to me," I say, taking him from her arms, and before she can prevent me I have carried him into the other room, and laid him on my bed.

I cover him carefully over; his drowsy eyes close, he is sound asleep again in a moment.

"Our talking disturbs him; he will sleep better there," I say, as I go back to my darling, whose face has become almost as white as her gown, the one I gave her in which to go bravely to Hetty's three years ago,

With gold embroidered gorgeously,

and out of which her bosom and arms gleam like living snow.

"It is time we returned," she says timidly, as I take her hand, and lead her to the chair, from which she has risen.

"They will not be back yet," I say, looking at my watch; then stooping to pick up her cloak, I fold it neatly, and put it on one side. I think she watches me with a kind of fear, and when I sit down beside her she does not look up.

"And so you will not marry Siva, Green Sleeves?"

She does not answer, only in the growing darkness I see her head droop a little lower, her slender hands twist themselves together.

"But then you never liked him, Green Sleeves, and his persisting in his entreaties has only made you despise him more. Some day a man may love you whom you do not despise, and whom you will learn to love, for you have done no harm, child, and you are lovely and sweet enough to take any man's fancy, and what would you say then?"

"Do you give me leave to say Yes," she cries, in a voice of agony, "if that time ever comes?"

"If that time ever comes—yes. You must not regard an honourable offer of marriage as an insult. Remember that you are now exposed to the love of any man who pleases to offer it to you, for I cannot protect you, Green Sleeves . . . and do you think that your love for me is such that you will be able to live out the rest of your life on the memory of it?"

"I was going to say," she says slowly, "that just so long as your love for me will last, so will mine for you . . . but that is not true, for you are a man, and men sometimes change, while I—"

"Love," I say gently, "you will never have a chance of doubting again whether my love for you will last till my life's end, for till that end comes, or till God calls you, sweetheart, you and I shall never part. We have said our last farewells, now . . . *now*," I snatch her in my arms; "not one word will we utter but words of welcome, of reunion; we will forget the past year as though it were a dream, and be happy . . . happy . . ."

"Happy," she echoes, shivering in my embrace, and seeking to struggle away out of it; then in a voice of despair, "O! what madness brought me to you here to-night?"

Through the gloom I see her eyes gazing at me wild and wide, in them the look of a woman who knows her mastery over the man in whose power she is, to be gone, whose only weapon against his strength is her weakness, as her only chance of salvation are those prayers to which passion has rendered him deaf as the dead.

"Do not tremble, little one," I say gently; "did I ever hurt one hair of this pretty head? And none shall ever again speak to thee of love, sweetheart, save him that thou lovest!"

"Love you?" she says, almost in a whisper, "yes, I love you now for your honour, courage, nobility—for the fortitude with which you have borne an unhappy fate, and however noble or good a man may be, I say to myself always, 'He is not like my darling' . . . and so you will let me keep my

good opinion of you, and love you still, and I will forget these wild words that my own folly has forced from your lips to-night. . . .”

“O! Green Sleeves,” I say grimly, “you will not make me barter you away for your good opinion—I have got you now, and I mean to keep you. We shall go away together this very night, for soon some one will be coming in search of you, and any man who dares challenge my right to my own, why, leave me to reckon with him.”

“And is my love of no price to you?” she cries; “do you value my body more than my soul? I tell you that if you force me away with you to my own degradation and yours, you will bitterly repent it, for I shall despise you . . . and what happiness shall we find in our guilt if we have not even love wherewith to sweeten it?”

“I have enough for both,” I say; “and as to your hatred, why, Green Sleeves, I do not fear it—I know your heart better than that.”

“And it is all my doing,” she cries passionately, “all . . . no one will believe that I did not come here to persuade you to go away with me, and I shall be disgraced in every one’s eyes—in Florizel’s—for ever.”

“No,” I say, some of the rapture within me breaking out in my voice; “they shall know the truth when we are—away.”

“You cannot force me to go away with you,” she says, trembling; “unless you use violence I shall find means to escape you. . . . O! Dick, that it should come to my longing to escape from *you*, as though you were my bitterest enemy!”

“You could make a scene,” I say quietly, “but who would dare to meddle with you, or take you from under my care? I should tell them that you were my wife, and no one would raise a finger to help you. Green Sleeves . . . sweetheart, how dully your heart beats . . . not one leap or thrill of joy that we are together at last. . . .”

“No,” she says, “it will never beat high for joy of being

with you till I can come to you with *honour*. How shall we be happy? I despising you for so degrading me, you scorning me for, however unwillingly, yielding to you. . . . O! it would be hell, and it would but end in our parting again, a million times more wretched than we are now."

"Death may part us," I say rashly, "but none else ever shall."

At this moment we hear the sound of hurried footsteps on the stairs—another instant, and Ullathorne is in the room.

CHAPTER III.

"He's ta'en her by the milk-white hand,
And by the grass-green sleeve,
He's mounted her hie behind himsel',
At her kinsmen speired nae leave."

THE room is in darkness save for the light afforded by the street-lamps without, but Green Sleeves' white dress reveals her, and with a sudden exclamation Ullathorne advances.

I do not relax my hold of her by one hair's breadth, but a bitter pang runs through me as she holds out both hands to him, and strives to escape from my arms.

"Take me away with you," she cries faintly; "it is not his fault, I sought him . . . ; I came to him here . . . O! Dick, have mercy, and let me go."

"Thank God that you did not take her from my house, Dick," cries Ullathorne. "When I returned home to find her missing—for somehow I have been restless about her all the evening, and I left Hetty at the theatre, and came back alone—I *could* not believe you capable of that dishonour, and yet I felt certain she must be with you."

"Siva molested her," I say curtly; "but neither he nor any other will have a chance of doing so again; for the future she remains—with me"

"No, no," cries Green Sleeves, in a voice of anguish; "O! do not punish my act of folly, of madness, so heavily . . . do not heed him, Ullathorne; he is not himself to-night, and the fault is all mine, not his!"

"Dick," says Ullathorne, impetuously; "you will not surely take so base an advantage of this poor child's trust in you—would she have come to you to-night had she not put implicit faith in your honour? I always knew the danger there would be in your meeting, and if the sight of her has for a moment obscured your better reason, never think, friend, that we shall despise you for it . . . only let her come away home with me before her absence has created a scandal."

"Whatever scandal there may be she shall never hear it," I say calmly; "go your ways, Ullathorne, and do not seek to meddle between us—nor you nor any other man living shall tear her from my arms now."

"O! Charolais," he cries, groaning; "what unhappy fate drove you to this house to-night? There must have been some madness working in his veins before you came, that in a moment he should thus cast honour, self-respect, courage to the winds!"

"If *her* words have not moved me," I say indifferently, "you may be sure that yours will not. And now, these are my rooms; this is my wife—leave us."

"Never. If needs be I will take her from you by force. I will summon help and overpower you, but I will not leave her here against her will—against your honour—all."

"Let us see which be the stronger, then," I say.

Before Green Sleeves can utter a cry, or he make more than one step forward to stay me, I have opened the door behind me, thrust her into the room beyond, locked her in, and wrenched out the key.

"Now take her from me if you are able," I say, setting my back against it. "To that room there is no ingress save by a grated window, or over my body."

"I can wait," says Ullathorne, sadly, "and she—love will give her patience to wait also. To-morrow's sun will bring different counsels to those that the shock of seeing her has betrayed your heart into giving you to-night. Dick, can you bear to fall so low in the eyes of one who has hitherto so looked up to, and worshipped you?"

"I can bear anything but to go on living without her," I say harshly. "For God's sake keep your platitudes to yourself, or you'll turn a desperate man into a madman."

"Better to be actually mad, to have lost control of the reason bestowed by God for your guidance than in your senses to commit the cowardly, dishonourable deed you meditate! Dick, is it *you* who would so betray this tender, delicate creature, so utterly dependent on your honour, and whom by every law of love and right you are called upon to protect even from yourself?"

"She loves me," I say doggedly, "and would soon forgive me . . . our lives are unendurable apart. What would the crying out of the whole world matter if we were happy in one another, as we should be, *shall* be?"

"The world is nothing," he says: "your own hearts would be your accusers. And Charolais is intensely sensitive; she feels her position most keenly now, when she has done no wrong, and in the eyes of all is free of the slightest stain, how would she bear those daily stabs of scorn and condemnation from which all your love would not have power to shield her?"

I answer him nothing, and he goes on again.

"Then there is something more than the chance of discovering in your wife's antecedents some previous ceremony or marriage that would make yours with her invalid, and if this should be proved, will you ever forgive yourself for this premature seizure of that which you covet? will you ever find in her company one-half the sweetness that would be yours had you waited till she could go to you honourably?"

"There is small chance of such happiness, and you know it, Ullathorne. You say this but to tempt me."

"No, before heaven," he cries vehemently. "I have been taking certain steps lately; believe me, Dick, that I seem to see the day not so far distant when I shall see you and Charolais restored to each other's love and *honour* yet."

"And I," I say slowly, "see nothing—nothing but that I have her here, safe as any pretty, timid bird, and you bid me open my hand to let it fly away from me—for ever."

"And even if it did," he cries, coming up to me, his voice full of urgent strong entreaty, "would not that be better far than to cage, and day by day see it pine and wither away, unable to draw a free breath in the stifling impure air of *dishonour*?"

"She would be happy," I say, in a voice that I strive vainly to harden, "love such as mine *must* content her—it shall."

"Never," he says sadly; "and your love will become a curse to you when you find how by its indulgence you have only purchased her contempt. Hitherto your love has been her pride, her glory . . . Dick—friend, let it so remain to the end if you have valued the purest, truest heart woman ever gave!"

"I cannot let her go," I say, trembling; "it is beyond my strength." But even as I speak I know that he has conquered—through heart, brain, and body, I am conscious that I have *lost* her.

"There is the key," I say, dashing it down on the table; "take it—but for God's sake don't let me see her, or even hear her voice. Get away now while you can, or I will not answer for myself—haste, man, haste."

I throw myself face downwards on the sofa, my hands pressed against my ears; when a minute later I tear them away I see that the door of the room beyond is open . . . she is gone from me for ever . . . my gentle love, my one love . . . Charolais . . . Charolais . . .

CHAPTER IV.

“ Present fears
Are less than horrible imaginings ;
My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,
Shakes so my single state of mind that function
Is smother'd in surmise.”

It is a wild night, the clouds scudding rapidly across the moon's face seem to be blown on their course by the high winds that will cease not in their wild work till our coast is strewn with the wreck of many a gallant ship, with the lives of many a husband—a father, for whom there will be bitter weeping on the morrow.

And in my heart, too, all is tumult and despair, for to-day a certain chill, terrible conviction has come home to me : how, not for sake of honour, or love, or duty am I to be parted for ever from my Lady Green Sleeves, but for a reason stronger than either of these, for the reason that Death has called her, and that she is going to him faster far than she ever hurried to the arms of her earthly lover.

She has been ailing a long while, but it is only during the past few weeks that the boys' faces have become sad and pale, that they have turned their heads aside when speaking her name, and still, *still* it did not come home to me that her illness was aught but the languor and weakness she always feels in autumn, until in Ullathorne's eyes to-day I saw by chance a heartbroken look of pity, that somehow told me the truth.

And then—when in my agony I would have gone to her, have convinced myself with my own eyes that my fears, his hesitating words, meant nothing, he told me that I must not go—for that in her present weak state it was as much as her life was worth to see me. And then, God forgive me, but I cursed him that he had not told me sooner, before the sight of him that she loved best on earth had power to harm her ; but not heeding my mad words, he told me how only quite lately

they had begun to fear for her, and how there seemed to be no reason for her fading but sheer weakness, and inability or even desire to live, and how not even the child had power to rouse her for more than a moment now. "She has never been the same since that night last spring . . ." he went on sadly; "she blames herself so bitterly for going to you . . she has realized what your life is so much more keenly since that terrible scene . . . I think she got a shock then, Dick, from which she has never been able to rally."

I wrung from him that she was at Sieviking with Pink May, and this I took to be the saddest omen of all, for I know how since my enemy had spread the story of Hagar abroad in the neighbourhood, Green Sleeves had shrunk from the bare thought of revisiting the old place.

And so the last, only mercy I can do my darling is to stay away from her . . . I am to submit to lose her certainly, rather than that the fear of my injuring her shall imperil her weak life . . . Oh! sweetheart, when thou liest past any chance of suffering from the violence of one who never harmed thee save through excess of love, shalt I not go mad with thinking how, if thou wert to die, I might have soothed thy dying moments as none other living could?

In the valley of the shadow of death no kiss or word of mine could work thee ill; with the sacredness of the future upon thee thou mightest speak some words of comfort to him that thou leavest, and do no sin . . .

"God help those who let her die without permitting me to see her once again!" I said, as I parted with Ullathorne to-day; but as he turned away, there was that in his face which told of a misery only one degree less than mine.

I have but one ray of hope, and that a feeble one. How, if indeed she were in serious danger, they would scarcely dare hinder my going to her . . . How it is because there is yet a chance that the trembling flicker of life may be cherished into a steady flame that they would guard her so jealously against the possibility of danger.

And somehow I know most surely that if I could go to her *free*, if she could creep into my arms and rest there without sin or shame, that love would strengthen the springs of life at their sources, and she would not die . . . and it is this thought that works madness in my veins as I wander out on the wild November night that is in fiercest consonance with my mood.

I find myself at last on the bridge that is haunted to me by the memory of the woman whose existence alone prevents my going to her who withers and dies out yonder; and, as I lean over the parapet, looking down at the rush of hurrying waters, now gleaming pale in the moonlight, now invisible as the clouds are driven across the heavens, the story of Paul Ferroll comes into my mind.

It is years since I read it; and then I could not understand how such a man could have committed such a crime; but now in a sudden blinding flush of light I seem to see the whole story, and heart and soul *understand* it.

How the contrast of his wife with her from whom that wife had sundered him was ever before his eyes; how the knowledge of the suffering of the woman he loved, worked silently in him; how day by day her gibes and the provocation of her presence induced in him a slow, terrible resentment, until one morning with perhaps no premeditated thought of murder in his mind, the hand obeyed the lightning impulse of the wicked will, and sped the instrument of death on its way.

I feel a hand on my arm; starting violently I turn to find myself face to face with Hagar. She has been drinking—no uncommon occurrence with her now—and she must have followed me here step for step, and that is nothing rare; latterly her course has been farther and farther downward, and now that by law she has not the slightest claim upon me she has grown reckless, and cares nothing for degrading herself in my eyes so long as she can force herself into my presence, compel one word, however harsh, from my lips.

"Our old trysting-place," she says, with a wild laugh, her hot

breath on my cheek, one heavy arm thrown round my neck ;
“ kiss me, Richard, and give over thinking of that poor white-faced fool at Sieviking ! ”

For a moment I stand motionless—with that hateful arm lying where last *her* tender arm lay, with that drunken breath close to the lips that *she* last kissed, with that insult to my gentle love mingling in my ears with the sound of the rushing waters at our feet . . . and in my heart for one awful, irresponsible moment—*murder*.

One little push—and to her death, to my darling, life . . . as a man in drowning sees his whole past existence in a second of time, so do I now see the future that might be mine were I free of this woman . . . with my whole strength I thrust her from me at the very moment that I see a man's shape crossing the bridge towards me.

CHAPTER V.

“ Weel may I kiss these pale, pale lips,
For they will never kiss me ;
I'll make a vow, and keep it true,
That they'll ne'er kiss ane but thee.”

My hat has fallen off—he can see my face more clearly than I can see his. It is only when he is close at hand that I recognize Gilly.

He is mad drunk ; brandy and opium have almost completed their deadly work on him, and there is the ferocious glare of the maniac in the bloodshot eyes, flecked with yellow, that meet mine in the moonlight.

“ You've led me a fine chace to-night,” he says, in a strange voice, such a voice as one might hear in the sleep-walker. “ I passed you in the street, but lost sight of you once or twice.” He sways heavily towards the parapet as he speaks. “ Good God ! what's that ? ”

"Get you home with you, Gilly," I cry fiercely. "What set you following me here to-night? You are in no state to be abroad—get you gone, I say."

But he does not heed me; he is staring towards the middle of the bridge at something which a moment ago lay prone where that desperate impulse from my arms had hurled it, and, as it rises, he staggers a step or two forward, and comes face to face with Hagar.

A scream of mortal fear rings out on the night; mingling with it is a sound like the growl of a wild beast, as Gilly springs at her throat, and fastens there.

"*You!*" he cries, shaking her in his grasp as a terrier shakes a rat, his distorted face glaring frightfully on hers as his long bony fingers strangle the very cry in her throat as it rises for help. "At last—at last—"

It has all passed with the rapidity of lightning . . . I can understand now how on an occasion of unexampled emergency a brave man may be reckoned coward, as another may be held accessory to a murder, because in the one supreme moment only when help could have availed, his powers have been paralyzed by shock beyond the power of interference.

. . . Momentary as has been my inaction, it may yet have proved fatal, for, as I dash forward, I see how beneath that awful grip her eyes are starting from their sockets—that her face is livid.

There is the strength of a dozen men in his hands as he drags her to and fro, she clutching feebly at his clothes and face. As well try to unlock those fingers by force as to tear asunder rivets of steel—she would die beneath my very effort to save her. Between the eyes I strike him a blow that might fell an ox, and like one he drops at my feet, and I know that Hagar's life is saved.

Her face is horrible in the moonlight as she falls back. In these few moments she has tasted the whole bitterness of death, and perhaps now is conscious only of how she has missed its peace,

but I have time for no more than a look at her, for scarcely has Gilly dropped, than he again staggers to his feet, and with the persistent instinct of the drunkard makes straight for Hagar.

"Back!" I cry, throwing her behind me, but he comes shouting on, shouting such words as convince me how drink has in very truth overthrown his reason, and that he is—mad.

"How dare you come between my wife and me?" he cries, with a curse; "leave us to reckon with one another, or it shall be the worse for you." And blind with drink and fury, he once more tries to seize her.

"This woman is not your wife," I cry, as I repulse him; "you have mistaken her for another person—you will be sorry for this mad night's work to-morrow morning."

"That is not my wife?" he says, in a curiously-sobered tone; "then supposing you tell me *whose* wife she legally is at the present moment?"

"Mine!"

He bursts out into a wild peal of laughter.

"Before God, if one of us two be mad to-night, Sieviking, I am not that man. I married yon poor wretch fifteen years ago in Paris—I told you the story once, but you've forgotten it." . . . His gaze wanders, the fumes of opium once more obscure his brain. "Fifteen long years my fingers have had that itch in them . . . poor thing, and I loved her once, I wouldn't have hurt that pretty throat for worlds . . ."

He is no longer in the dangerous stage, but the maudlin. Such a trifle as this I am able to note as I turn to the woman who still cowers behind me.

"Hagar, is it true?"

But even as I ask her, some such keen and bitter pain runs through my heart as he may know who after undergoing the slow tortures of starvation sees set before him a feast that he has not strength to taste, that comes to him too late. . .

She looks up at me, ghastly as the dead, and I say to myself

that had the fires of love never been lit in this woman's eyes my darling might be strong and happy now.

"If you had asked me five minutes ago," she says slowly, "I would have sworn that it was a lie . . . I would have moved heaven and earth to keep you from *her* a little longer, but you saved me from *him* . . . it was like you, my love, my dear . . . never a man in the wide world your equal . . . and now you will go to her, you will be happy" . . . she snatches my hand to her lips, presses one desperate kiss upon it, then like a shadow has crossed the bridge and is gone.

CHAPTER VI.

"Now keep, now keep your very life,
Bowing down, bowing down;
You have that lady to be your wife,
And aye the birks a' bowing."

DAYLIGHT is breaking cold and grey when I cross the woods of Sieviking, and pausing for a second beneath the tree that has been witness to each epoch in my life, ask myself, trembling, if I shall reach the house yonder too late.

A night mail brought me to within twelve miles of Sieviking, and these I have walked, the first ten rapidly, but over the last two my feet linger as may those of a man who goes unwillingly to meet some evil tidings.

Yonder the old home rises before me that contains my darling, and I am free to go to her, to remain with her. Into my arms she may creep to-day with never a shadow of sin or shame upon brow or heart. Why, therefore, do I, who a month ago would have hurried to her on the wings of the wind, tarry on the threshold of my joy?

It is because a chill, awful, foreboding is upon me that another lover has sped before me, and kissed her tender lips; it

is because I fear to see his seal upon her brow that I shrink from that first terrible glance at her that will tell me the truth, and even as I approach the house, something strange, *unusual* about it arrests my attention.

The window of her room is open, and as I stand still to gaze at it, a figure flits hurriedly past.

At the hall door, which is open, is drawn up an empty carriage, which I know to be that of a family doctor who lives three miles away, and while I am yet a considerable way off, he comes out, gets into it, and drives away.

He does not see me, nor do I seek to stop him ; I shall hear the truth fast enough in the house yonder, never fear.

But as I cross the threshold hope and I have done with one another as much as though I were about to raise the coffin-lid to take a last look at my darling's face, and it is with no shock of surprise or pain that from the parlour to my right I hear the low, agonized sound of the boys' weeping.

"It *isn't* true . . . it *can't* be true . . ." sobs the Squiffer ; "there is nothing the matter with her, but weakness and fretting after Dick. She would get quite well if she were with him . . ."

"He must be sent for, he must be told," says Solomon, miserably ; "he can't harm her *now* . . . O ! Charolais, Charolais . . ."

"No, I cannot harm her now, I shall never harm her any more," I say to myself as I go noiselessly upstairs to my darling's room, of which the door, as the window, is wide set open as though she perished for lack of air.

On the threshold I meet Pink May coming out ; she is crying bitterly, but without a sound, as though she would not have *her* know it ; and even when she sees me utters no cry, but, as one whose heart is too weighed down for speech, puts her arms around me, and so we stand for a moment, then I set her back, and go in, closing the door behind me.

Wan as an Easter lily, Green Sleeves is lying on her white

bed with dark eyes closed, and pale hands folded on her breast. As I draw near, I say to myself that I come indeed too late, for that she is already dead.

But even as the thought is born, her eyes open, with something in them more solemn than mere human wonder, she sees, and holds out to me those weak arms, and so for the last time our hearts beat once more against each other.

How shall I tell her my news of earth with this message of heaven ringing sweetly in her ears?

With a terrible pang I somehow realize that she is glad and ready to go—that she is setting out on her journey *willingly*, and that all my love has not power to stay her one moment on her way.

"How quickly you have come," she says, by-and-by in her gentle voice; "until yesterday they did not know for certain how it was with me . . . and then when I was taken ill in the night they were frightened, and sent for the doctor, but he cannot do me any good, dear; no one can do me any good now."

She is smoothing the hair from my forehead as it rests against her bosom, with a touch in which is no passionate clinging as of earth to earth; already she is of one land, I of another; our real farewell of heart to heart was spoken a long while ago now.

"You will suffer less when I am gone," she says softly; "the struggle, the longing to be near me will be over . . . and I, I have given over struggling now, dear; during the last few days somehow I seem to have found *peace*."

"But supposing that you need not struggle against it, my darling?" I cry; "supposing that we may be together always—?"

"Hush!" she says very solemnly; "O! do not vex me with such words now. It was my fault, all my fault that terrible scene last spring . . . but I was punished, for when I saw you and Ullathorne, as I thought, about to fight, perhaps kill

one another on my account, something struck me to the very heart, and though I did not cry out, I think I got my death-blow then, Dick."

And so my violence slew her . . . O! Green Sleeves, my heart, my heart . . .

"It is better as it is," she says, after a little pause; "you will not miss me, for we have been so long apart, and you will bring up our child . . . I thought I loved him as well as you once, but I know differently by now."

She pauses for a moment, for her breath is faint, then goes on again.

"I thought to-night that perhaps I should not see you again; I seemed to see you arriving too late, and shutting the door behind you, coming to my side here, and looking down on me, Dick . . . and I thought that you would say to yourself 'though she would not come to me without honour, she must have loved me or she would have been able to live without me,' and then I opened my eyes, and you were actually before me."

"It is all fancy from beginning to end, my darling," I cry desperately; "you have made up your mind to die from sheer lack of desiring to live, and for my sake and our child's, you must not, you *shall* not, for O! Green Sleeves, there is neither sin nor shame in our loving each other now, for you are my wife, sweetheart—you have been my real wife all through."

"In the eyes of God, not of man," she says sadly. "O! Dick, death would be very bitter instead of sweet to me had we ever been happy at such a terrible price."

"Green Sleeves," I say, kneeling beside her, but still supporting her in my arms, "Hagar was never my wife at all . . . she was married to Gilfilian in Paris fifteen years ago."

For a moment I say to myself that the shock of my news has killed her. Then—

"I am your *wife*?" she says, trembling.

"My love, my darling, always my wife, my *only* wife . . . and you would go from me, you would leave me here alone . . ."

"I wanted to go," she says, almost in a whisper. "I was glad to go, but now . . . *now* . . ."

Love wakes in her . . . life stirs in her veins, her lips tremble towards mine, and a faint colour comes to her cheek . . . she throws her arms around me, and clings with all her poor strength to my heart, a woman now with earthly feet that fear to leave the ground, no angel that eagerly desires to spread its white pinions heavenward in flight . . .

"But the doctor said that I *could* not live, Dick . . . and I was glad . . . O! hold me, keep me, do not let me go . . ."

But even as she speaks, her arms relax, and white and insensible, as though she were already dead, she lies in my arms.

* * * *

Shall I hold thee, shall I keep thee, my beloved, O! my beloved?

If love can save, if prayer can win, if skill can avail, then may our Lady Green Sleeves be spared to us yet . . . and Spring, who hideth so many secrets in her beautiful warm breast, shall tell us that which nor I, nor any medicine, nor any man living upon earth can know.

THE END.

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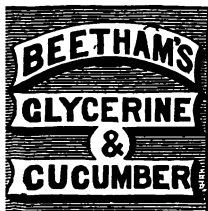
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PEPPER'S TARAXACUM AND PODOPHYLLIN

A Fluid Liver Medicine, made from

DANDELION AND MANDRAKE ROOT.

Good for Liver Disorder and Indigestion. The best Antibilious Remedy.

Without a particle of Mercury. Safest and surest Stomach and Liver Medicine. Clears the Head and cures Headache. Regulates the Bowels.

Bottles, 12 doses. Sold by most Chemists. Beware of imitations; many Chemists professing their own equal **Pepper's** renowned Liver preparation.

LOCKYER'S SULPHUR HAIR RESTORER.

THE BEST. THE SAFEST. THE CHEAPEST.

*Restores the Colour to Grey Hair.
Instantly stops the Hair from fading.
Occasionally used, Greyness is impossible.*

Where the Sulphur Restorer is applied scurf cannot exist, and a sense of cleanliness, coolness, &c., pervades, which cannot result from daily plastering the hair with grease. Sold everywhere, in large bottles holding almost a pint, 1s. 6d. each. Be sure to have **Lockyer's**.

SPECIALTIES FOR ALL	Sold by the Principal Druggists at Home and Abroad.	THE YEAR ROUND.
JACKSON'S RUSMA.	For the Removal of Hair, without a Razor, from the Arms, Neck, or Face, as well as Sunburn or Tan. The activity of this depilatory is notable. It is easy and safe. It leaves a Whole Skin and a Clean Complexion.	At 1s. By Post, 1s. 2d.
JACKSON'S BENZINE RECT.	For taking out Grease, Oil, Paint, &c., from all absorbent Fabrics, Dress, or Drapery; Furs, Gloves, Slippers, Books, and Manuscripts, it cleans with equal success. It may be freely used to wash Gilt surfaces to which water is destructive.	At 6d., 1s., and 2s. 6d. Parcel Post, 3d. extra.

JACKSON'S CHINESE DIAMOND CEMENT

For China, Glass, and what not.

T. J., in making this Cement, has constantly kept in view the production of an article fit for general household purposes, and which would, with average care, repair damages, so that the mended articles should be



This device is printed on the Wrapper of every Bottle of the Genuine Article.

able to do duty alongside the sound ones. It surpasses in neatness, in strength, in cheapness, and retains its virtues in all climates. It has stood the test of time, and in all quarters of the world.

Sold in Bottles at 6d. and 1s. each; by Inland Post, 1s. 2d.

H. R. H. Prince Albert's CACHOUX.	Dainty morsels, in the form of tiny Silver Bullets, which dissolve in the mouth and surrender to the breath their hidden fragrance. The little Caskets containing the Cachoux bear a Medallion of the late Prince Consort. They are also furnished with "The Albert Gate Latch" (Registered), being THOMAS JACKSON'S contrivance for paying out the Cachoux singly.	At 6d. By Post, 7d.
JACKSON'S INCENSE SPILLS.	A SPARKLING means of Incensing a Domicile, and of Exorcising Evil Smells. An enchanter's little wand, that on being fired becomes to the receptive as a Medium which quickens the fancy, be its mood grave or gay, kindly leading the captive to that ladder, the top of which reaches through the clouds to the borders of Fairyland.	At 6d. By Post, 7d.
1885.	From the Laboratory THOMAS JACKSON Strangeways, MANCHESTER.	

PEARS' SOAP

A SPECIALTY FOR THE COMPLEXION

*Recommended by SIR ERASMUS WILSON, F.R.S., late President
of the Royal College of Surgeons of England, as*

"The most refreshing and agreeable of balms for the skin."

MDME. ADELINA PATTI writes :—"I have
found PEARs' SOAP *matchless for the hands
and complexion.*"

MRS. LANGTRY writes :—"Since using PEARs'
SOAP for the hands and complexion, *I have
discarded all others.*"

MDME. MARIE ROZE (*Prima Donna, Her
Majesty's Theatre*) writes :—"For preserving
the complexion, keeping the skin soft, free
from redness and roughness, and the hands in
nice condition, PEARs' SOAP *is the finest
preparation in the world.*"

MISS MARY ANDERSON writes :—"I have
used PEARs' SOAP for two years with the
greatest satisfaction, for *I find it the very best.*"

PEARS' SOAP—SOLD EVERYWHERE